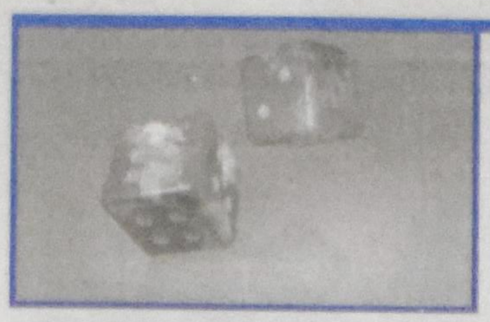

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Birth pangs of a nation

Women holding crosses in Independence Day ceremony July 9. CSM

Agar Lmarol members perform traditional celebration dance. CSM

Walter Miedema

JUBA, South Sudan – On July 9, the Republic of South Sudan officially declared its independence from northern Sudan and became the world's youngest country. The streets of its new capital, Juba, were full of jubilant South Sudanese shouting "Bye-bye Bashir!" to the north's oppressive President, while the town's digital clock flashed "Free at last." The country's bold new flag uses bright colours to represent blood, peace, water and land.

This declaration of independence ratifies a January referendum, when over 98 percent of South Sudan's population voted for complete political separation from the northern Islamic government of Omar-al-Bashir. Under pressure from the international community, al-Bashir's government initially agreed to respect the results of this referendum. In April, however, al-Bashir stated that the declaration of independence would not be respected if the new Republic of South Sudan includes territory in the state of South Kordofan.

South Kordofan contains many Christian communities that have fought alongside the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), South Sudan's official army after independence. Residents of South Kordofan also have ties to the SPLA's political counterpart, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, which formed the interim government of South Sudan after a peace agreement was reached in 2005.

Lure of oil

South Kordofan also encompasses a rich, oil-producing area surrounding the town of Abyei, one of the few sources of oil revenue that remains under the control of the northern government, even after independence. The Northern army made moves to take control of Abyei in April. By June, tensions had exploded into armed conflict. On the 6th, fighting broke out between northern and southern forces, with both sides claiming that the other instigated the conflict leading them to retaliate by entering Abyei.

On June 14, Northern Sudanese forces began intensive bombing. Over 144,000 people fled the area in the weeks following. After a ceasefire was called, negotiations were held in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, which ended in an agreement to remove all Sudanese military forces from the Abyei area. The northern Sudanese government had been encouraging a UN withdrawal since May.

A complex agreement was also reached to determine cooperative control of the region, but conflicting statements still threatened to plunge Sudan into another lengthy civil war. As part of the agreement, Ethiopian and UN troops will be posted in areas surrounding Abyei and South Kordofan and all Sudanese military presence will be withdrawn. Unfortunately, two days before independence, Omar-Al-Bashir and the northern government had pulled out of ceasefire talks and were threatening attacks on the pro-South militia groups that remain in South Kordofan.

Deep-rooted conflict

While the desire to control the country's oil resources is a contributing factor to this conflict,

See **Sudan** *on page 3*

Mission work

Mission and relief agencies are vital in assisting the refugees displaced by the most recent bombings in South Kordofan. Currently, the CRWRC trains farmers in effective and useful methods for growing cassavas and sweet potatoes, and educates street children in vegetable cultivation. The Mennonite Central Committee also has plans to work alongside local churches to build up and strengthen South Sudanese communities.

The head of the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC) called for a week of prayer prior to July 9. Two member churches of this council, the Presbyterian Church of Sudan and the Africa Inland Church Sudan, are native to the territory, and they are working in cooperation with many mission and relief agencies of the WCRC's other members, such as the CRWRC, that have a significant presence in South Sudan.

Looking back, looking forward:

60 years of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada

Anne van Arragon Hutten

These excerpts are from a recent, cross-Canada study. They outline characteristics of the CRC's Canadian roots and examine the health of the denomination today.

My church background

I was born in the Netherlands and baptized into the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in Zuidwolde, Drenthe. My parents took us to Canada in

1950, where we became the sixth family in the CRC at Orangeville, Ontario. Eleven months later we moved to the Acton area, which didn't yet have a CRC. We became members when a congregation was organized there in 1953.

My membership in the Kentville CRC began when I moved to Nova Scotia in 1962. Over the decades I was active in a number of the

See **Church** *on page 2*

Church *continued*

church's programs. By the end of 2009 it became clear to my family that the Kentville CRC was no longer the place for us. The two sons who worshipped there with their families left in January, 2010, and I left with them. They have become members of the local Presbyterian church. As for me, I don't feel at home there and now attend mainly the Baptist church in my community.

The CRC in 1950

After World War II, with immigrants flooding into Canada from Holland, "home missionaries" of the American CRC travelled north to gather them into congregations. In Nova Scotia, Rev. Ralph Bos visited one immigrant family that had settled quite happily into a community church. He told them in no uncertain words that they belonged in the CRC, not in a Canadian church. At a time when the *Dominee* still held considerable authority, they obediently drove to Kentville from then on.

This was the pattern across much of Canada. New immigrants coming off the train from Halifax were often met by two elders of the church. The CRC worked hard to help newcomers find work or a place to live, or acted as translators. As an institution to help immigrants it was massively useful. The newcomers had little or no knowledge of the language and customs. But they felt at home on Sunday morning, hearing the familiar liturgies in their own language and being able to share experiences with other Dutch people.

The van Arragon children ready for church ca. 1956.

The changing church

In 1970, the Canadian CRC was doing well; it had almost 70,000 members. Kentville's church increased from about 100 to 400 people (mostly internal growth). Across the country, pastors generally had Dutch names. In the 1970 Yearbook, 189 ministers had names starting with *Van*. And that's not counting Zondervan. Nonetheless, worship services in the Dutch language had been phased out in most congregations by the early 1970s.

In the 1980s, the CRC started to lose members. They married non-Dutch partners, moved to other denominations or dropped out of church altogether. The Kentville congregation gave birth to a Neo-Pentecostal church first; it then helped start a Vineyard church, a Wesleyan church and an Associate Reformed Presbyterian church.

Some congregations lost members to even more conservative branches of the Reformed body, sometimes based on long-ago doctrinal difference in The Netherlands. But in many cases, those who left the CRC simply became more "Canadianized" than the church they left behind.

Today's CRC

The world has changed radically over sixty years, and the church has needed to change with it. But those who try to make Christian faith relevant within today's world too often run into solid resistance from the older generation.

In too many congregations there has been a group, perhaps small, but vocally determined to hold on to their own standards for what they perceive as Christian behaviour. This can lead to judgmental attitudes, harsh criticism and a non-welcoming attitude. Where change is held back by a vocal minority, it has often led to an outflow of younger members.

As a result, many new church plants have emerged within the past decade or so. Not burdened with the expectations of an older generation, they can literally start from scratch. Those who start church plants see the need for a new approach to worship and community. Some no longer identify themselves as CRC. They're choosing names like River City, the Journey, the River, and Hope Fellowship – names that provide no clue to the group's identity. This could indicate a wish to get away from the Calvinistic heritage, or maybe a desire to get away from certain cultural expectations.

These are not mere name changes. Many congregations now downplay any talk of church doctrine. The emphasis is on having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and on being active in service projects. As in the rest of society, the church has modernized and updated its beliefs and practices.

The CRC is increasingly diverse and fragmented. In practice, it has become almost congregationalist, with every congregation doing what seems right in their own eyes. In society at large, individuality has replaced conformity, and that has clearly influenced the church.

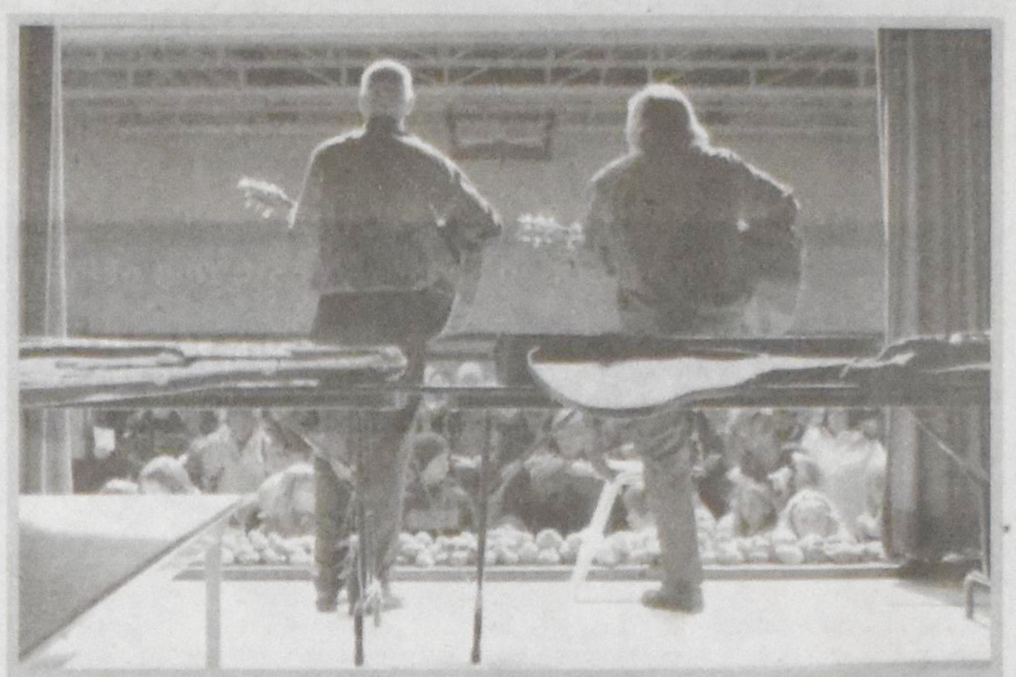
Does the CRC have a future?

I'm appalled to think that in 1944 my parent church in The Netherlands lost many members to the *Artikel 31* movement. This occurred while Jews and Gypsies and others were being murdered wholesale, and city people were starving to death. I've not yet understood the bone of contention. There are still plenty of reasons for disagreements today, such as gay rights, worship styles and evolution.

In contrast to several mainstream denominations, the North American CRC has not done too badly. From 1963 on, membership numbers rose steadily to a peak of more than 316,000 in 1992, but the following decade saw a loss of 48,000 members. Neo-Pentecostalism, also known as the charismatic movement, caused schisms in many denominations including the CRC.

The membership of the North American CRC now stands at 255,340, a drop of about 20 percent since 1992. In the Canadian segment, total memberships stood at 73,000 in 1989. This spring it was 74,529 members. In other words, membership numbers are stable.

Church *attendance*, however, is decreasing everywhere.



Michael Broersma and Pastor Peter Slofstra (left) leading worship at Hope Fellowship in Courtice, Ontario. Church members symbolically carried the stones (stage front) from this rented location to their new church building.

Sixty years ago CRC people went to church twice a Sunday. Now, attending three out of four Sundays is considered normal. Even when membership numbers hold up, attendance does not.

What will survive

My research indicates that the CRC in Canada has better numbers than those of most other denominations. Numerous members have left, but an influx of new people has replaced them. Despite some stagnant congregations, the CRC has become part of the local scene in many places. Considering the massive decrease in Christian practice within the entire western world, it has done well to keep its membership levels at a certain plateau.

The church, however, is not a business. It's just not possible to judge its success using a secular yardstick. We're not dealing with stock prices here, or five-year business plans. Churches operate on a wholly different plane. Or they ought to.

What will ensure a future for the CRC, according to Bert Witvoet, is "spiritual depth and faithfulness to scripture." Witvoet, contributing editor of *Christian Courier* and a leader within the Canadian CRC, says that "You need to be intentional about your faith, and you need to live it. Prayer, and helping others. In the Reformed faith, believers are meant to be citizens of the world, and to take care of creation. If that is practiced and lived, there will be a vital church."

Julia Vanderveen, pastor of First CRC in Vancouver with her husband, Trevor, agrees. She said the Vancouver church has not "compromised on their Reformed thinking." She fully supports reaching out to the community around them, but not at the expense of discarding all sense of tradition or history. She points out that eight students at the non-denominational Regent College, who had been attending the CRC during their studies, will be going on to Calvin Seminary this fall because they love the distinctive Reformed tradition.

When I asked one pastor if he thought the CRC would survive, his response was, "Who cares?" Like Bert and Julia, he seemed to suggest that the survival of a denomination does not matter per se, so long as the faith on which it was based does survive.

Anne van Arragon Hutten presented a longer paper on this topic this past May in Fredericton, at a Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies conference. She is the author of several books including UPROOTED: Dutch Immigrant Children in Canada 1947-1959. *Anne lives on a farm near Kentville, Nova Scotia. Anyone wishing to read the whole paper, please email Anne at arragon@ns.sympatico.ca.*

News

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

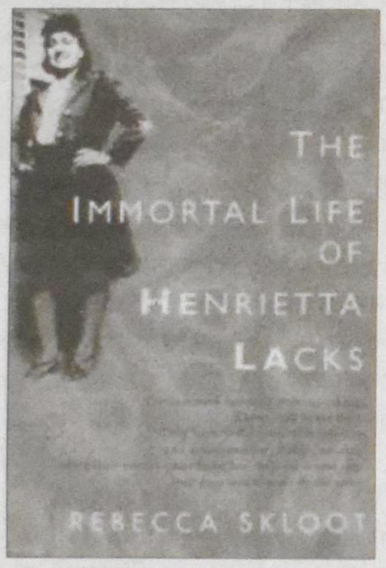
Biological immortality

We live in a world that is framed by death. In Genesis 3:19, after Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree, God says "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return." As the old adage goes, nothing is certain but death and taxes. Each creature seems to have an ascribed typical lifetime. For humans anything beyond 80 years is a gift, and only a few live beyond 100 years.

Biologically, death is actually a complex process. Daily we lose cells from our body – they die, but new cells are created that permit us to continue as individuals. Biologists have discovered that cells can only divide (and so reproduce) a limited number of times. This limit is usually from 40 to 60 times and has been called the Hayflick limit. There are pieces at the end of our strands of DNA called telomeres; each time a cell divides, these telomeres get shorter until eventually the cell is unable to divide. The telomeres act as a biological clock; the shorter they are, the "older" the cell line is. This shortening correlates with aging in humans. Thus immortality would require that, biologically, we prevent the shortening (or restore the length) of our cells' telomeres.

One exception to this includes the cells which have a form of telomeres that do not show the incremental shorting when they divide. In some ways, these cell lines can be called immortal as they divide (or reproduce) continuously. One such cell line is the HeLa cell line, a sample of which has been kept alive in cultures since the 1950s. It seems the same today as it was over 60 years ago. Jonas Salk used it in the early years to test his polio vaccine, and since then it has been used in many lines of research, such as studying AIDS and looking at the effects of toxic substances and radiation. According to Rebecca Skloot, more than 60,000 scientific papers have been published whose research depended on using this cell line.

In Petri Dishes (plastic flat dishes used to grow cells in the laboratory), the ability to divide indefinitely can be a positive characteristic. In the human body, however, it is deadly. The HeLa cell line derives from a cervical cancer found in Mrs Herrietta Lacks, who died of her cancer on October 4, 1951. One of the negative characteristics of cancer is that its cells continue to divide uncontrollably. In looking at other human immortal cell lines, most are also derived from tumours. An aggressive cancer grows rapidly, and we cannot survive that growth without treatment. One of the active lines of cancer research is trying to determine how to reactivate the telomere clock so that the tumour's growth is limited.



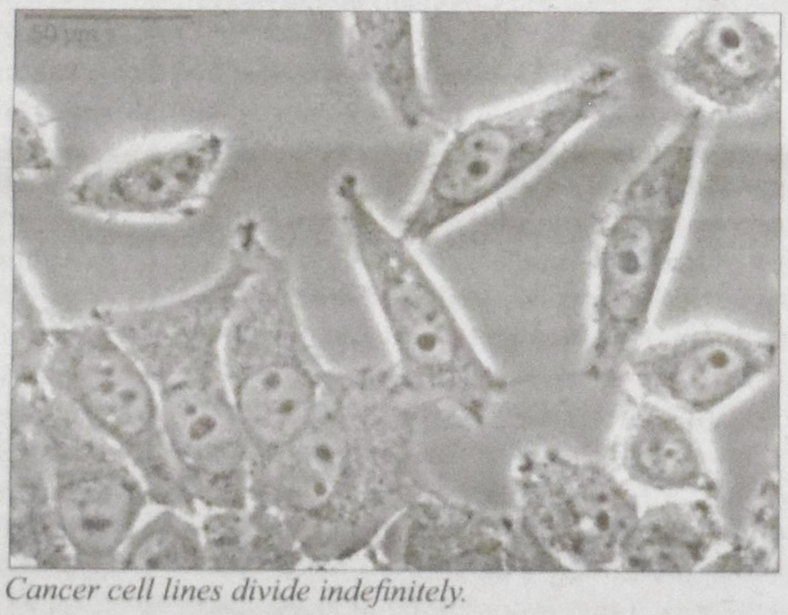
Cell suicide

There are many natural internal processes in cells that cause them to die (such cells are said to commit suicide): when they are defective, when they are no longer doing what they should or when they are not needed. Shortly after birth, for example, the human brain undergoes a process where neurons which have not formed effective meaningful connections with other neurons die. This leaves neurons which have formed these connections with the freedom to continue to grow and together become a correctly functioning brain. This planned neural cell death is a natural part of every baby's growth.

From a biological perspective it is hard to see how death can be circumvented. At the level of the individual, natural death seems to be a part of nature. Scripture speaks of humans coming from the dust and returning to it. We are part of a material creation. In this creation, it is paradoxical that the only immortal cells are part of a disease process that cruelly shortens the life of the individual hosting these cells.

1 Corinthians 15:52-3 says "and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality." To me this says that our present body, in which the only immortal cells are tumour cells, will be changed so that all our cells are immortal but controlled in a way that results in our personal immortality. A new immortal body will be ours, but the biology will have to be very different. I look forward to the return of Christ when we will be physically changed.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who has passed the halfway mark of a human lifetime, is a member of Waterloo CRC and a Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, ON.



Cancer cell lines divide indefinitely.

Sudan *continued*

tribal and religious tensions play a role. Nomadic Arab and Islamic herders of the Misseriya tribe typically use the land in the marshes of the river south of Abyei for grazing in the dry season. They inhabit the territory in which the Dinga Ngok, a tribe who have for the most part converted to Christianity, live year round. Years of civil wars have created a culture of severe mistrust between these two communities. There are many allegations that the SPLA is perpetrating human rights abuses in its attempts to keep the peace.

The SPLM also faces international scrutiny on how it will establish a healthy, democratic constitution and government that will allow for the presence of political opposition and for minority forces to be heard. Close ties between the government and the army make this extremely difficult. Some have even said that the tribal and political tensions in South Sudan could boil over into genocide, similar to what Rwanda experienced, if outside observers do not keep a close eye on the operations of the SPLA.

Beyond military conflict, the government of South Sudan faces the difficulties of building a healthy economy in a war-ravaged area. The South remains dependent on the north for processing and exporting its oil resources, at least until it can make new arrangements with other surrounding countries. But engaging in international deals might draw more attacks from the north. The northern government has already forced the south into using its refinery and export resources, threatening to shut down its oil pipelines unless the South agrees to share an equal portion of its oil revenues. The South is also heavily dependent on the North for much of its food.

A spirit of optimism took over the young country on July 9; now it remains to be seen whether their jubilation can carry South Sudan forward.

"We have resolved to overcome the past and face the future with a renewed sense of purpose," parliament speaker James Wani Igga announced to a crowd of tens of thousands on Independence Day. And even though the sound system set up in Juba's city square did not carry far enough for everyone to hear him, the cheers were deafening.

Walter Miedema (walter.p.miedema@gmail.com) lives and writes in Vancouver, B.C.

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Editorials

Underneath the shell

Bert Witvoet

After having attended some eight past synods of the Christian Reformed Church of North America as a reporter, it was a new experience for me to be a delegate this year and to watch the slow movement of the mighty CRC turtle from underneath its century-and-a-half hardened shell! I felt as if I had reached the pinnacle of my spiritual journey when I was handed a Synod 2011 delegate badge with free meal privileges and the password to the 2011 synodical website, giving me access to all the various committee reports. It was not quite like being handed the keys of the kingdom, but it came close.

What do I think of Synod 2011? It was a careful synod. It decided not to appoint a study committee to reexamine the church's stand on homosexuality, at least not this year. It decided not to give confessional standing to the Contemporary Testimony at this time because we are in the midst of a discussion on the Belhar Confession. It decided to send the Covenant for Officebearers, intended to replace the Form of Subscription, back to the study committee mainly because the president of Calvin College did not think it would bind the college's professors enough. Also, Synod did not want to sanction confirmation ceremonies for parents who were opposed to infant baptism.

It was also an active synod. It did accept changes to the Church Order that allow children at the Lord's Supper without insisting they have to make a public profession of their faith. It accepted the new translations of the three Reformed Confessions. It accepted with a fairly close vote the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural proposal that includes a goal of 25 percent racial minorities in senior leadership positions. It changed the ministerial pension plan because of pressure from Canadian government pension fund regulators. It approved the recognition of the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms.

It was a congenial synod. What I enjoyed the most, however, was the work of the Advisory Committee I was on. Our committee, consisting of some 20 delegates, dealt with a number of overtures, most of them having to do with objections to the new Covenant for Officebearers. A number of overtures wanted to retain the statement from the old form of subscription that the three confessions – the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt – *fully agree with the Word of God.* In our discussions we felt that such a statement was not needed since the Covenant already says that "these confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture."

My personal rejection of the request to insert "fully agree with the Word of God" is much stronger. As I see it, this statement elevates the confessions to a plane where they have equal authority with Scripture. When something is in full agreement with the Word of God, doesn't that mean it is infallible? We reject the Catholic Church's assertion that the Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra,* is infallible. Why should we claim such a distinction for what are basically human documents, treasured and useful as they are for the preservation of the historic Reformed understanding of the faith?

In a recent edition of *Christianity Today,* editor-in-chief David Neff interviews Bishop Kallistos Ware of the Greek Orthodox Church in Britain. Bishop Ware sees tradition in a dynamic way. He quotes a definition given by Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky: "Tradition is the life of the Holy Spirit in the church." Bishop Ware believes that tradition "is not a fixed formula. Still less is it writings in leather-bound volumes . . . . It is not simply fixed doctrines, but the continued self-understanding and self-criticism of the Christian community" (July 2011, p. 38).

I like the bishop's concept of tradition even though I don't think the Orthodox Church generally practises a dynamic understanding of tradition. I wish we would apply Lossky's definition a bit more freely to the three confessions of unity. As it is, we often treat them as if they were infallible, fixed for eternity, in full agreement with Scripture. Because of this less than dynamic view of tradition evident also in the CRC, I am loathe to add more confessions to the shelf containing leather-bound CRC volumes. I am, for example, against elevating the Contemporary Testimony to the level of a confession for that very reason. Let it remain a vital testimony in our midst, which we can update from time to time, so that it reflects the life of the Holy Spirit in the church. For that same reason I do not support accepting the Belhar Confession as another confession. Let a brief paraphrase of it be inserted into the Contemporary Testimony *Our Word Belongs to God.* We have enough idols in our midst as it is. We don't need another statement that will claim to be in full agreement with the Word of God. The shell of the turtle is hard enough.

Bert Witvoet is an elder in Jubilee Fellowship CRC who thinks the Heidelberg Catechism is the Rembrandt of the three confessions. He and Alice live in St. Catharines, Ontario.

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Playing dice with the planet

John Hiemstra

"Albert Einstein famously refused to 'believe that God plays dice with the world,'" J.R. McNeill writes. "But in the twentieth century, humankind has begun to play dice with the planet, without knowing all the rules of the game."

Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us that "There is nothing new under the sun," but a cursory study of 20th-century environmental history shows that something dramatically new *is* occurring. "This is the first time in human history that we have altered ecosystems with such intensity, on such scale and with such speed. It is one of the few times in the earth's history to see changes of this scope and pace," McNeill concludes in *Something New Under the Sun.*

I should begin by saying I'm not an environmentalist. This development is not simply an "environmental issue" – it's much bigger than that. It's a broad ranging, inter-related "ecological question," meaning it involves the full creational reality in which God made us, including the ability of creation to give us oxygen to breathe, food to eat, shelter, clothing, work and community. Humans are 100 percent creatures, but creatures who reflect God's image. It is God's intent that humans flourish as, and in, his creation. Therefore, the "ecological question" is not simply about a single type of environmental interest or issue, but an all-of *life* question! Consequently, I think it's time the church recognize the "ecological question" as *the* overriding problem of the 21st century.

Ecological transformations

Massive environmental changes are reported daily in our newspapers. As just one example, scientists recently told the UN that the world's oceans are suffering from worse health than predicted, including mass extinction, ecological dead zones and melting sea ice.

Human use and abuse of God's good creation is growing so rapidly that it now threatens both human wellbeing and the flourishing of creation itself. At increasing speed, we are stripping the world of resources and dumping huge quantities of waste into air, water and land. Society's obsession with endless growth in wealth and personal consumption is the cause of rapid resource depletion and every-growing waste streams. Our cozy lifestyles demand constant economic violations of a host of creation's ecological limits.

Now combine this with a global population that is primed to swell from just under seven billion to 10 billion by 2100, according to the May 2011 UN study, *World Population Prospects*, even "if fertility in all countries converges to replacement level." That means 10 billion people will want the wealth, nay, the overabundance, that we in the rich global north take for granted. Think of the stunning growth we see in the emerging economies of India and China, each with populations well over one billion.

Christian priorities?

Christians should have responded to our covenant relationships with God, neighbour and creation by addressing the ecological question. The churches – both as church-institution and as citizens in the church-dispersed – should have raised the alarm about climate change, ballooning human population, declining populations of animal species and threatening extinctions and resource-depletion, -competition and -conflict. We should have spoken up prophetically on poverty in the global south mirrored by new poverty in the wealthy north, our unsustainable industrial food production system, the looming threat of peak oil and fossil fuel shortages, painful worldwide human migrations and wasteful lifestyles based on artificially-generated needs. We should have shown how these problems are all linked in the emerging ecological question.

Fortunately, a handful of Christians, and a few agencies, have spoken out. But most Christian citizens are essentially silent. Perhaps our silence has grown out of a belief that there is another

Letters

Replacement theology

Christian Courier has provided a fair amount of writing space for those who attack the Genesis account of how mankind originated (April 25, "Easter trumps humanity's fall"). In the June 13th issue of *CC*, there's a discourse on the Letters page between Rudy Eikelboom and Ray Stellingwerff, suggesting that we need to redefine who Jesus Christ really was and that a new and more complete narrative to that effect will develop in ongoing discussions.

I implore the above-mentioned writers to do some serious reflection on what they are espousing. In my opinion, they are becoming a stumbling block – if not to our children then certainly our grandchildren, and perhaps for many others in the C.R.C.

Jesus warns us against causing little ones to stumble (Matt.·18:6).

Prof. Kevin Flatt (*CC,* June 27) comes at the issue of accepting evolution from a cautionary viewpoint, but does not give any clear directive.

Our intellectual men and women need to be called to attention when it comes to interpreting the scriptures. Let's make sure we don't become a church which is guilty of replacement theology (allegoric interpretation of scripture), because that leads to complacement theology (the arrogance of placing ourselves above the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

Sir Winston Churchill, the great British Prime Minister, statesman, historian and author, said, "We reject with scorn all these learned and laboured myths, that Moses was but a legendary figure. We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally."

By God's wonderful grace there are still many in the C.R.C. who believe in the infallibility of the holy inspired word of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus poses the question, "Will I still find faith when I return?" All of us need to call to attention and accountability those who want to rewrite and redefine the word of God.

A wonderful poem by an unknown Dutch author called "Not understanding yet believing" can serve as a wake-up call in understanding who God's son really is. One of the verses reads like this:

"Whether we are healthy, wealthy, sick or poor / One day we all shall surely need the Lord. / Then this will be question number one / What have you done about Christ my son?"

If you would like to read this poem in its entirety (either in the original Dutch or my translated English version), email *arumph@sympatico.ca* and we will send it to you.

A. Rumph
Collingwood, ON

THIS JUST IN... NASA CONFIRMS A LARGE ASTEROID WILL IMPACT EARTH TOMORROW, ENDING ALL LIFE AS WE KNOW IT.
NEWS EDITOR
THAT'S TERRIBLE... FIND OUT WHAT KATE WILL BE WEARING!

A note on sacrifice and sin

In the exchange between Ray Stellingwerff and Rudy Eikelboom (*CC*, June 13) the issue was raised, "Without sin, why the sacrifice?" As a teenager, I rejected a literal reading of Genesis 1, regarding it as a poetic summary of events. In the same way the story of Adam and Eve could be read as a summary of early human history. If this is correct, then the conflict Stellingwerff seems to have with Eikelboom can easily be resolved: sin came into the world (told in a literary form) and sacrifice is necessary.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, AB

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Playing dice with the planet *continued*

way out of this mess? The most common excuse for ecological quietism, which I hear from Christian neighbours, is that technology will eventually solve our economic and ecological problems, increase efficiency of production and deliver substitutes for rapidly disappearing resources. Just make smart technical adjustments to the economy and the ecological question will magically drop off of our list.

I too believe technology is a gift from God. It has done, and can do, wonderful things! But the doctrine of creation reminds us to be empirical. And reality clearly shows that many technological fixes are now producing solution paradoxes. They are paradoxically failing to correct problems, often making them worse and sometimes creating new, more-complex problems.

When I dig deeper, I discover the ecological question is rooted in an idolatrous obsession with economic growth and technology. Since idols lure us away from the life-giving Creator, at the top of the church's list of duties is to expose and resist them. Perhaps the ecological question belongs up there as well?! Once creation care becomes a true priority for the church, it will reawaken faithful earthkeeping and hope for the renewal of all creation in God's coming Kingdom.

Dr. John Hiemstra teaches in the Politics-History-Economics (PHE) 4-year BA program at The King's University College in Edmonton and is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

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News

Crystal Cathedral to be sold to escape bankrupty

Marian Van Til, *with files from CCO and Orange County Register*

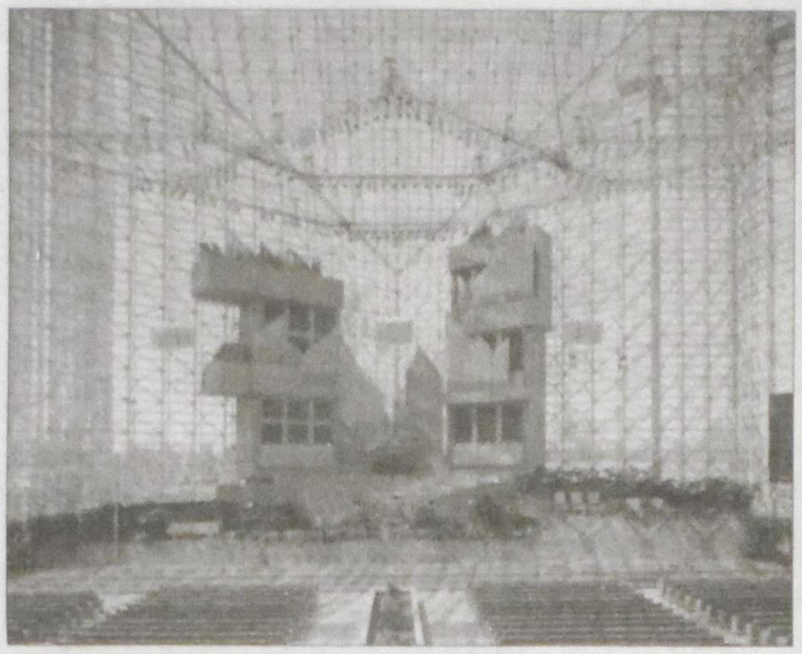
GARDEN GROVE, California (CCO) – The world famous Crystal Cathedral, which has struggled financially for four years and is in bankruptcy, may be bought by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange (California). But it could also end up as part of a university campus.

The Crystal Cathedral is the 3,000-seat Protestant (nominally Reformed) church built by televangelist Robert Schuller.

The local Roman Catholic diocese released a statement earlier this month saying that Bishop Tod D. Brown had authorized a law firm and other diocesan advisers to "explore the possibilities" of purchasing Garden Grove's glass cathedral. But the day before, Chapman University put in a $46 million offer to put a health science campus on the cathedral's 35-acre property. Chapman is a 6,100-student institution which began 150 years ago as a school associated with the Disciples of Christ church.

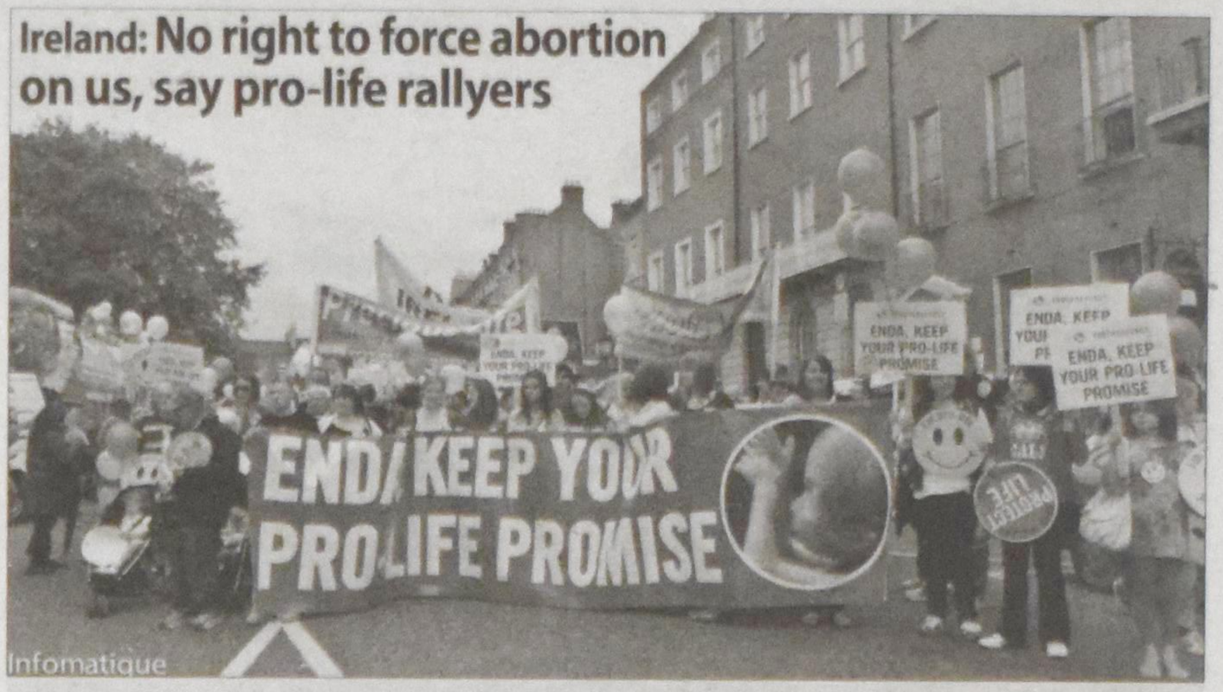
The Catholics would prefer to see the "cathedral" remain a house of worship. It is not an actual cathedral, that is, the seat of a bishop, but it could become so under the Catholic plan. The Diocese of Orange is looking into building a cathedral in Santa Ana to meet the needs of about 1.2 million Catholics in Orange County, which is the 11th largest diocese in the United States.

"While we continue to develop plans for a cathedral in Santa Ana, it is prudent to evaluate the opportunity to engage in the pending auction of this property and to mitigate the chance that it ceases to function as a place of worship if acquired by others," Bishop Brown said.



Crystal Cathedral interior: Bankrupt.

Ireland: No right to force abortion on us, say pro-life rallyers



Infomatique

DUBLIN, Ireland (CNA) – Thousands of people attended a large pro-life rally in Dublin on July 2 to oppose attempts to force abortion on Ireland by changing its laws.

Organizers said the "All Ireland Rally for Life" was "hugely successful." It served as a warning to the political party Fine Gael that the Labour Party's plans to legalize abortion in Ireland are "unacceptable to the majority of Irish people." Speakers called on Prime Minister Enda Kenny to keep his promise that his party would oppose legalizing abortion.

In December, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Ireland's abortion ban breached the rights of a woman who had to leave the country in order to procure an abortion. Fine Gael then set up an expert group to examine the judgment.

But the "rush" by Ireland's Labour Party to call for abortion legislation after the ruling hurt their performance in the 2011 elections. Niamh Uí Bhriain of the Life Institute urged the crowd not to accept a review committee that is "stacked against the unborn child" or that ignores "the evidence that clearly shows that abortion is never medically necessary."

Carolyn Johnston of Youth Defence said Irish pro-lifers demand that the government "listen to the pro-life majority who say 'yes to life' and 'no to abortion.' [Prime Minister] Kenny needs to tell the European Court not to interfere in the right of the sovereign people to decide Ireland's pro-life laws."

Bernadette Smyth, the director of rally co-host Precious Life, said that Ireland's protection of life is a light to the world. Pro-life people have united to ensure that politicians opposed the legalization of abortion, she said.

Dana Rosemary Scallon, a well-known singer and former Member of the European Parliament (MEP), also addressed the crowd. "Our Constitution belongs to the people.... The majority of people in this country do not want legalized abortion in Ireland," she said. "Europe has no right to force abortion on the people of this country."

The rally began with a march from what is known as the Garden of Remembrance to the lower house of the Irish parliament. Police said that about 8,000 people participated. Several hundred counter-demonstrators who support abortion also attended to protest the event.

CRWRC: Harvest Hope campaign meets its goal

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRWRC) – "People are changing. We as a committee are going to keep working hard so others can see how life can improve." Those words from Bornface Chiwaya, the chairperson of a village committee in the Kamanzi area of Malawi, are a great testimony both to the passion of that village to improve its way of life and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee's (CRWRC) long-term commitment to working alongside villagers to help them do that.

But that kind of success was nearly halted this past year when CRWRC received unexpected news from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that its past proposal for funding was not being retained. While CIDA requested that CRWRC re-apply under a new proposal framework in 2011, CRWRC was left uncertain about how it would fund vital programs in 2010. Fortunately, the relief and development agency's supporters took up and met the challenge.

"Harvest Hope was a special appeal organized by CRWRC to fill this gap in funding for programs that are vital for overcoming poverty," said CRWRC Director Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo. "With heartfelt gratefulness to God and our community of supporters in both Canada and U.S., we are thrilled to announce that as of June 30, the Harvest Hope campaign received $829,209, which surpassed our goal of $825,000."

Generous response

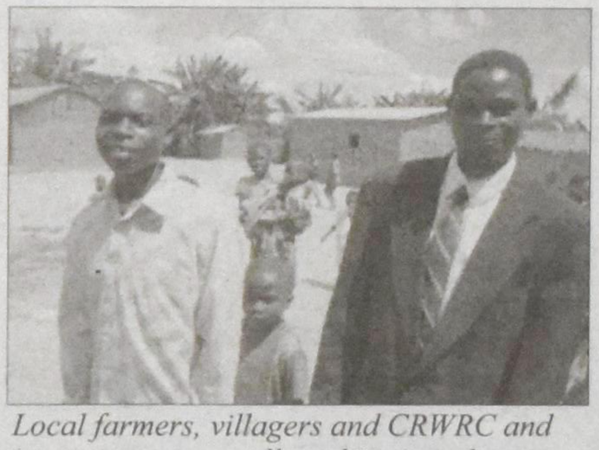
Most of the gifts for Harvest Hope came from church deacons who organized a special Sunday offering, and from individuals who made generous contributions. Several other individuals gave large gifts directly to CRWRC.

"Whatever the amount, each gift has been significant for enabling CRWRC to keep its promise to communities and help them change their story of poverty, injustice and disaster to a story of assets, shalom, renewal and ultimately hope," said Mutoigo.

Bornface Chiwaya's village in Kamanzi is a great example. In recent years the village has built sanitary latrines, started seven nursery schools, improved its harvests through conservation farming techniques and started a seed loan program. Through Harvest Hope contributions, CRWRC was able to continue working in this region during the past six months.

In that time the community used conservation farming techniques which enabled it to harvest significantly more crops than on the adjacent traditionally-farmed fields. The seed loan program provided beans, soya, cassava and peanut seeds to farmers. In May, those farmers harvested their bean crop and easily paid back the 600 kg of beans they borrowed, which will now be saved for next year's seed loan.

"How privileged we are to share their joy and enthusiasm in work well done," said CRWRC-Malawi staff member Larry McAuley after visiting the project. And indeed, CRWRC does feel privileged – not only to be part of this kingdom building work, but also to be supported by so many churches and individuals across North America, says Kaastra-Mutoigo.



Local farmers, villagers and CRWRC and its supporters are all working together to improve life in Kamanzi, Malawi.

Confident of future help from Canada

CRWRC also remains confident in its ongoing and future relationship with CIDA. The original denial from CIDA did not have an impact on the matching funds that CRWRC receives from CIDA for disaster relief and food aid programming through its membership in the Canadian Food Grains Bank (CFGB). In the past year CRWRC received $6,333,348 in matching funds from CIDA, which, combined with CRWRC's $1,548,174 equity and contributions from CFGB and other CFGB members, enabled CRWRC to get access to $10.5 million for disaster programming.

The denial was also not an indication that CIDA had lost faith in CRWRC's community development programs. In fact, CRWRC was asked to apply for, and did receive, $215,000 in transition funding from CIDA to help see them through this fiscal year.

"As CRWRC awaits word from CIDA regarding the proposals submitted in 2011, changes are being made in CRWRC's budgets to provide greater flexibility for any eventuality, and [to] ensure priority programs continue in spite of gaps in funding from CIDA," said Kaastra-Mutoigo. "As we make these adjustments and plan for a different relationship with CIDA, our commitment to help people overcome poverty and injustice does not change. Instead, it is stronger than ever. Harvest Hope supporters have played a critical role in keeping our promise to do this strong and true. We pray that their support will continue in the years ahead."

News

Timothy Leadership Training expands across the globe

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – During the fiscal year that ended on June 30, the Timothy Leadership Training Institute (TLT) conducted 38 leadership trainings in 18 countries, teaching at least one TLT course to about 600 students, and starting work in Mali, according to Charles Powell, president of the TLT.

In TLT's June 2011 newsletter, Powell also says that with the help of its various partners, the organization has been able to reach thousands of students in various ways. All participants who are trained with TLT materials make action plans to bring about changes in their churches.

TLT materials, which are taught in modules, focus on teaching biblical and church-growth concepts to pastors and others in countries where theological training is difficult to access.

"Timothy Leadership Training is created and tested around this model: building the local church, equipping and unifying teachers in faith and knowledge."

The continuing growth of TLT, which is based at Calvin Theological Seminary, is made possible, Powell said, by "people of faith responding to the call from their God. It is an honor to be part of this ministry," he said. Powell was named president of the institute earlier this year. He replaced former president Rev. William "Bud" Ipema, who retired.

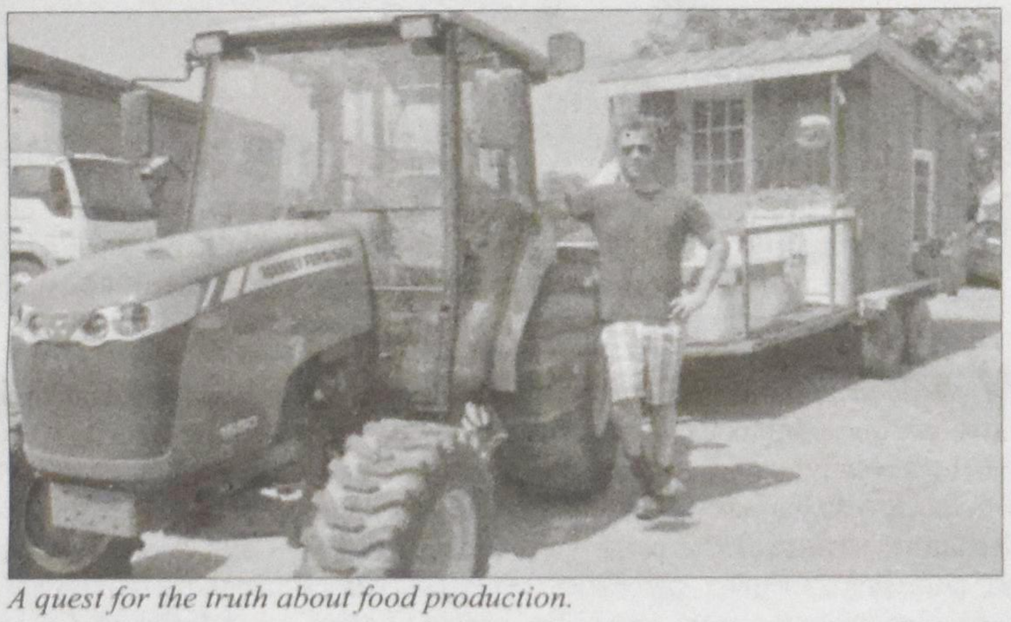
One of the highlights of the last year was being able to conduct a TLT program in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami that devastated part of the country on March 11. "The Holy Spirit is moving people to serve God in all parts of the world," says Powell. "Christ is inspiring people to action."

Only months on the job, the former businessmen continues to be amazed at the reach and acceptance of TLT around the world. "I simply cannot convey to you the joy and delight that comes from this. People need the transforming power and love only Christ can bring."

History professor examines Canada's farms – from a tractor seat

Marian Van Til, *with files from Locavore and the* Globe and Mail

HAMILTON, Ont. – A history professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, is crossing the roughly 9000 kilometer width of Canada in a unique manner. He's driving a donated tractor while pulling his accommodation for the trip: a tiny farmhouse. Dr. John Varty began his trek in Prince Edward Island and is making a video documentary of the trip.



A quest for the truth about food production.

As Varty makes his slow way across the country he will "probe the soul of the Canadian Farmer," as the *Globe and Mail* put it.

There is a nationwide debate going on about food production, says Varty, but he sees it as having been reduced to stereotypes. There are the good guys ("a plaid-shirted, organic-loving yeoman") on the one side and the bad guys ("a grain-slinging, technology-wielding market conqueror") on the other. The reality is far more complex, he says.

Varty told the *Globe*, "The alarm for the loss of the family farm has been out there for a long time," he said. "The question is what part of [the country] looks like the alarmist material and which parts don't?" A jaw-dropping 75 percent of Canada's farmers intend to retire in the next 15 years. That means their farms could not only be sold to new owners but very well might not continue to be used to produce food.

Is there some sacred mystery inherent to farming? If so, is "corporate farming," therefore, just a soulless capitalist enterprise? Varty says it's not one or the other. Corporations have always been involved with food production, he notes. Long ago, Canadians' demand for cheap food established the basis for the current system. And Varty thinks that the system he will see as he crosses the country will be more of a mix of small and large farms than most people think.

Hobby farming on relatively small plots is becoming popular but the average sized farm in the Prairies is 40,000 acres, Varty notes. Many are still family owned but are run more like businesses than such farms were in the past.

When Varty completes his trek and his documentary, Canadians will likely learn far more than they know now about the state of farming from sea to sea above the 49th parallel.

Massachusetts middle school asks 'disturbing' sex questions of 11-13 year olds

FITCHBURG, Mass. – A mother has taken legal action after her two daughters were forced to complete a school survey which asked whether they had ever had oral sex. Another questionnaire used with her children asked how many people they had had sex with, what form(s) of birth control they were using and if they had ever tried to commit suicide.

The survey deeply disturbed students, says John Whitehead, a constitutional attorney and founder of The Rutherford Institute. "Most of them don't know what oral sex is," he said.

The Rutherford Institute provides free legal services to people whose constitutional and human rights have been threatened or violated. On behalf of the mother he lodged a formal complaint to the U.S. Department of Education against MMS. Many other parents supported the complaint.

MMS Principal Fran Thomas said the school did not generate the survey. She claimed the school was required to administer it to get a grant. It was funded by a federal grant and administered by LUK Inc., a local social services agency, she said, in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). LUK, Inc.'s mission, according to their website, is to "challenge and support youth & families to recognize and fulfill their unique and productive potential through community-based prevention, intervention and education services."

However, a spokesperson for CDC denied any involvement in the Fitchburg sex survey. CDC said only seven states and six urban districts include sexual identity questions on their Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance surveys – and the questions are optional.

U.S.: New post-secondary ed regulations a concern to Christian colleges

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CT) – Christian colleges in the U.S. are hoping that a bill making its way through the House of Representatives may resolve their concerns over education regulations that went into effect July 1, reports *Christianity Today.*

Under the new regulations, created by the federal Department of Education (DOE) in response to reports of financial-aid fraud at several privately owned universities, states are required to have a "substantive" procedure to license private schools. For religious universities, this has raised concern that political agendas could be imposed on their missions.

"My concern is that there appears to be no limit to what factors a state can consider when granting or withholding authorization, and no mechanisms for appeal or due process," said Blair Dowden, president of Huntington University in Huntington, Indiana. Dowden testified in March before a U.S. House of Representatives committee.

The regulations include an exemption for religious institutions, provided the institution "is owned, controlled, operated, and maintained by a religious organization lawfully operating as a nonprofit religious corporation and *awards only religious degrees or religious certificates* [our emphasis] including, but not limited to, a certificate of Talmudic studies, an associate of biblical studies, a bachelor of religious studies, a master of divinity, or a doctor of divinity."

That definition is so narrow, Dowden testified, that "not one member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) would qualify for an exemption." All of the post-secondary institutions begun by or associated with the Christian Reformed Church members are members of the CCCU: Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Mich.), Dordt College (Sioux Center, Iowa), Trinity Christian College (Palos Heights, Ill.), Redeemer University College (Ancaster, Ont.) and The King's University College (Edmonton). The two Canadian institutions, of course, do not come under the auspices of the new American law but could be indirectly effected, and the regulations are a serious concern for the other three colleges.

A complete over-reach

Shapri LoMaglio, government relations director of the CCCU, said the council is strongly united with the rest of the higher-education community in wanting to see the new regulations eventually overturned. "These [regulations] are a complete overreach into the institutional autonomy that private colleges should [have] and need in order to function as the independent and unique institutions that they are," she said.

In an attempt to address concerns, the U.S. DOE sent out a "Dear Colleague" letter to higher-education institutions in March with dozens of answers to commonly asked questions. A second letter in May announced an extension for distance-education compliance until July 1, 2014, provided institutions make "good faith efforts to identify and obtain necessary State authorization before that date."

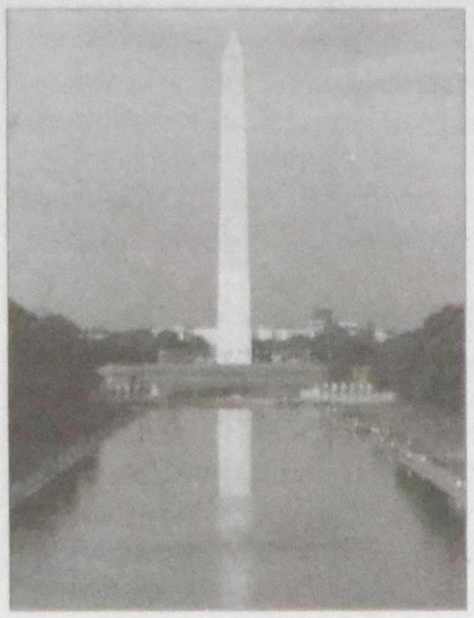
However, the majority of the higher-education community is still ultimately trying to get the regulations repealed. The bill sponsored by Rep. Virginia Foxx (Republican, North Carolina), chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, would not only repeal the regulations but would also prohibit the DOE from establishing a federal definition of the term "credit hour" in the future. (Critics of the credit-hour redefinition say it would limit innovations in educational programs and cause undue problems in accreditation.)

John Ebersole, president of Excelsior College in Albany, New York, said he thinks the bill will eventually be passed in the House, but he's doubtful about any success in the U.S. Senate. "Even if we could convince a few of the Democratic senators to support it, it would be very unusual for the President to sign a bill that essentially takes to task his own Department of Education," Ebersole said. "I really appreciate the spirit of the bill, but I don't think it's heading anywhere."

Columns

Travels in America

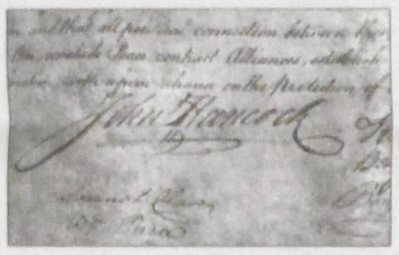
Part III: The Washington legacy



Mike Wevers

Our travels in the United States pivoted through its national capitol, Washington D.C., the namesake of its first president: George Washington. The city itself circles around the Washington Monument, an immense white obelisk centred on the National Mall. This double honour bestowed on one man – a city and a monument – is indicative of how much every American still honours him for the role he played in founding their nation.

When in Washington, it's essential to see the Declaration of Independence secure in the cavernous hall of the National Archives. (If you can't get there, be amazed by the security around it in the Disney movie, *National Treasure*). With other visitors, you will strain to see the signatures of the famous men who led the challenge to the King of England. You will find the famous signature of the President of the Continental Congress, John Hancock, standing out boldly from the others, and quickly understand why his "John Henry" has become eponymous with signatures thereafter. You will also see the signature of Thomas Jefferson, who drafted the declaration's words we have come to know so well, enshrined in his memorial on the Mall. But you will not find Washington's, who had resigned his seat in the Second Continental Congress by then to accept the position of Commanding Officer of the Continental Army. While other statesmen were crafting words, Washington was fighting battles.



He fought many battles to win the war, both on the field and in command in its most decisive ones. Most famously, he led the crossing of the Delaware River in the winter of 1776, halting the advance of the resurgent British Army. Had its advance not been stopped, the British would very likely have gone on to capture the fledgling nation's capital in Philadelphia, crushing the nascent rebellion. Washington continued to lead the army against the unrelenting British effort to retake America, until finally engineering its final defeat at Yorktown, Virginia in 1781.

Washington resumed the role of statesman with the end of the American War of Independence by becoming the presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. So while he did not play a role in drafting the Declaration of Independence, he certainly did influence, more importantly, the Constitution, providing the framework for the new state's ongoing governance. So you will see Washington's endorsement of the original copy of the Constitution also enshrined in the National Archives.

What defines a nation

Washington is the embodiment of the two principles which permeate American political life – freedom and liberty. As Commanding Officer, he galvanized a people in war to achieve freedom from tyranny. As a statesman, he helped create the constitution which reflects the Declaration's words: "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" lived and breathed by every American. Consequently, it was no surprise that Washington was the unanimous choice as the first President of the United States in 1789.

While American society was forged from the battles they celebrate on "the Fourth," on July 1, Canadians glory in our ability to tame a harsh land with a harsher climate. Our foundational document was a foreign piece of legislation, the British North America Act of 1867. It remained foreign until its "patriation" by the Trudeau government through the Canada Act over a century later. While cries of freedom beg to be memorized in the Declaration of Independence, most Canadians would be hard pressed to quote any of our foundational documents, although a few students of Canadian government may be able to cite the "peace, order and good government" section (otherwise known as the POGG clause). We are readily satisfied with a government that gives us a sense of order, rather than the chaos which is all too common in so much of the world, including, at times, the United States.

In a very short time, America will be remembering the tenth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Many tears will be shed as these tragic events are recalled, and yet the spirit of America will point to the tower which has risen from the ashes of that day. Officials have decided to call it One World Trade Center, but I will not be surprised if instead it will continue to be known as the Freedom Tower, with its 1776 feet height. Across the harbour, the Statue of Liberty will be looking on. Freedom and Liberty. They are America.

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton. He enjoyed a winter vacation with Helen, his wife, along America's east coast, including Charleston, Washington and New York City.

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

Walking your talk in the hayfield

I'm quite sure that *the best manure is the footstep of the farmer*. (Sometimes the farmers' discussions make for some glorious manure, too, but that's another thing.)

But back to that saying: *the best manure is the footstep of the farmer.* I believe it. I maintain – sometimes quite righteously (or self-righteously) – that those who never get out of the cab of their tractor are not fully in touch with the earth with which they are working.

The farmer who checks his crops with a pickup truck or "quad" is missing something, lots of somethings. That farmer misses variations in the crop; misses the sounds of grass, wind, bird and insect; misses most smells except exhaust.

I guess it's similar to people who drive air-conditioned cars, or bicycle (safely!) for their health, or jog with or without a headset. All of these miss a certain connection to earth, air, soil, water. They use fewer of their senses; they may inhibit the development of their intuitive knowledge of the earth.

So when I say, *the best manure is the footstep of the farmer*, you can bet that I mean to practice what I preach, that I *walk the talk*. And I do: I try to take a walk, poking around in the soil, in the grass, peering here and there like the Miss Marple of agriculture. (Or like Ratty and Mole from *Wind in the Willows*, if you prefer.)

But recently I had a reality check. A righteousness check. One of our hayfields is developing an infestation of a particularly virulent variety of yellow hawkweed. Left to itself, there would soon be huge patches of bright yellow flowers . . . and no hay. It was my job to control the weed in that field, using a hand-held sprayer and a nasty broadleaf weed killer.

I drove my car into the field and parked it in the centre of a section and then used portable plastic fence posts to mark off four-metre sections, each about 30 metres or longer. Then I zig-zagged back and forth looking for hawkweed and giving each clump a lethal shot of herbicide.

At first this was rather exciting. "Take that, you nasty devil." And, "Look at that clump!" "Ah, no thistles at all." Then the thrill of the hunt wore off a bit and I began to notice other things. I found out that the weed grew mostly in drier and more compacted soils and tended to develop where the topsoil was not deep. Where there was a thick stand of alfalfa, no hawkweed could be seen.

Another kind of footprint

I also discovered wildlife. Bluebirds were feeding young in the birdhouse made by grade-six student Wesley Lillies. There were two and half zillion tadpoles in the pond we call Lake Geoff. There were also leeches in Lake Geoff. Very natural, although I doubt that "feed the leeches" will attract eco-tourists.

I discovered a lack of wildlife, too. I flushed only one ground-nesting bird. Usually I should have seen many savannah sparrows and maybe a couple Lincoln's sparrows, but not in this field. Were the females "sitting tight" or are numbers way down? I don't know.

I encountered insects, black flies mostly, and some mosquitos, all demanding my blood.

The footsteps of the farmer were perhaps achieving a few things, but getting a little slow by the second morning of zigging and zagging. In fact, the crisp *zigs* began to look more like large loops until I caught myself and tried for a more precise coverage. Somewhere about this time, I began to wish for a quad or a tractor with a spray rig, footsteps becoming something of a shuffle.

All in all, though, it was a good experience, if not one I would choose to do every day. I am much more aware of the micro-topography of that field. I am more appreciative of the role of alfalfa and a thick sward of grass in weed control. In my mind I can say, "A little more humus needed here," or "more nitrogen needed."

The footsteps of the farmer may indeed lead to a lush crop, but they also express a sort of rootedness: Here I am, where God has placed me.

In *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Steven Bouma-Prediger asks this question: ". . . Could it be that contemporary ecological degradation is a result, in part, of us not knowing our places – our own specific, local habitats on this our home planet?"

My aching back and sore hips are a small price to pay if that's what it takes to help me know my place.

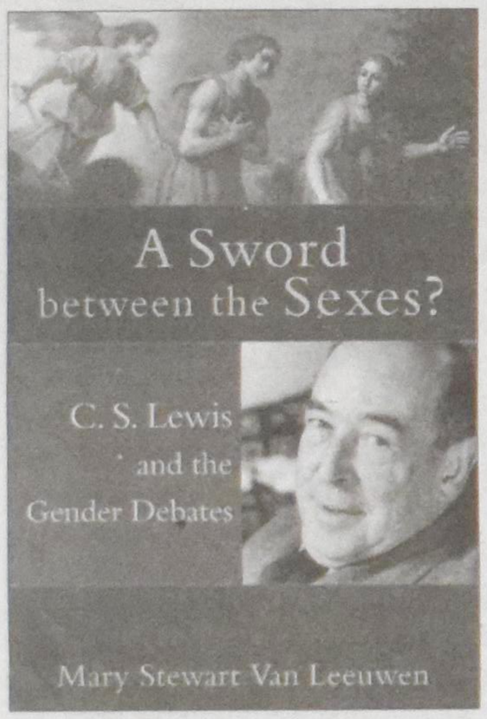
Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) is a farmer from Quick, B.C. He is learning more about soil, wildlife, and domesticated farm animals as he ages, although the mysteries of diesel engines still evade him.

Two-eyed Jack: C. S. Lewis and gender debates

Brett Alan Dewing

In her book, *A Sword Between the Sexes?*, psychology and philosophy scholar Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen seeks to reconcile what she sees as two very different "Jacks" (as novelist and apologist C. S. Lewis was privately known): one who, in the words of Dorothy L. Sayers, "is apt to write shocking nonsense about women and marriage," and one who is, in Van Leeuwen's words, "a better man than his theories." This tension forms the central debate over the place of women in the church and Christian culture.

Van Leeuwen makes rather too much of this perceived dichotomy. After all, it is unrealistic to expect a completely integrated picture of any fallen creature, when looking over decades of their work, life, and private letters. In a sense, aren't we all better and worse than our theories, depending on the time and place?



A Sword Between the Sexes? C.S. Lewis and the Gender Debates
by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen.
Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010.

On the other hand, the author also seems to disregard her thesis in a broader discussion of the life and ideas of C. S. Lewis, covering a range of his thoughts on subjects that would interest someone in her line of study.

The 3:16 switch

In her introduction, "Surprised by Jack," Van Leeuwen tells a little of her story and the role the writings of Lewis played in it. He played a part in her conversion to Christianity and definitely shaped the way she conducted herself thereafter as a Christian scholar.

Van Leeuwen agreed with Lewis that (in her words) "all of life is religiously motivated, and all human beings are characters in search of an author. If they do not yield to the true Author of the cosmic drama, they will certainly succumb, in varying degrees, to worship of one or more aspects of creation." (This is, incidentally, as strong a theological stance as you will read from the author of this book; she is much more used to discussing the questions of normative gender from a psychological viewpoint.)

After this freeing interaction, however, Van Leeuwen began to read further and started to suspect Lewis of "the 3:16 bait-and-switch:" a tactic of drawing converts with John 3:16, and then, "having successfully drawn women as well as men to Christian commitment by stressing how level the ground is before Christ's cross, they proceed to emphasize another 3:16, this time Genesis 3:16 (NIV): 'To the woman, [God] said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'" (32)

Shocking nonsense?

Indeed, while some of her examples don't persuade this reader, some of the quotes she draws from Lewis's work are shocking, especially one passage from *The Four Loves* that maintains that a woman may not successfully enter her husband's social circle: "She may be quite as clever as the men whose evening she has spoiled, or cleverer. . . . She does not realize that the husband she has succeeded in isolating from his very own kind will not be worth having; she has emasculated him."

What did the man behind Narnia really think about women?

This quote and others do paint Lewis as an of-his-time chauvinist, but many other passages, especially when taken in context, have proven the opposite to this reviewer.

In the end, she comes to a rather obvious conclusion: that as Lewis aged and came into more and more intimate relationships with women, leading to his late marriage to Joy Davidman, his views on women and marriage softened and altered. This is hardly surprising, nor does it require 264 pages to spell out, but this book may be of interest to those who, like me, find themselves intrigued by the man and writings of C. S. Lewis.

One last consideration

From the beginning through the last chapter (cunningly entitled "Suppressed by Jack"), Van Leeuwen challenges the near hagiography that today's Christians write about Lewis. Indeed, we do find ourselves tempted to view Lewis as a saint whose every word is next to Scripture.

Perhaps, then, the real question one should ask approaching this book and those of C. S. Lewis is one of discernment. After all, she is very right in noting that all of life is religiously motivated, and therefore no text or action is spiritually neutral. We must ask the Spirit to read along with us, illuminating the truth and letting the dross fall away. If read in this manner, *A Sword Between the Sexes?*, while sometimes a slog to read, can prove an interesting portrait of Lewis and his effect on both one woman's life and the whole of Christian thought.

Brett Alan Dewing (brettalandewing@gmail.com) is a poet, playwright and critic living in Warren Center, Penn. His work has been published in Windhover, hammered Out, Christian Courier *and* *catapult.

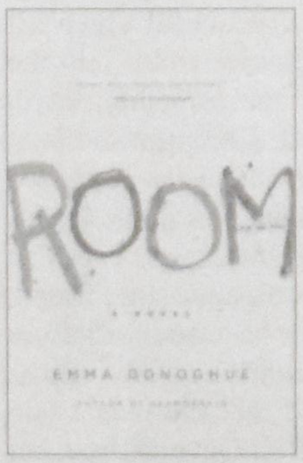
Growing up while locked away

Bethany Van Lingen

What if your world was held inside a single room? For five-year-old Jack, trapped inside a single room with his mother, four walls make up everything. But the question explored in Emma Donoghue's *Room* is whether four walls are enough.

Jack has "Room," and he has his mom. Most days, that's enough for him. It isn't for Ma, who has been kept there for seven years by a man who kidnapped her when she was nineteen.

But there's lots to do every day. Jack has to brush his teeth, water the plant and set up the chairs for breakfast. There are games to play in the room with Ma, like racing to see who can get the fastest time. Or Ma and Jack might shine a flashlight through the skylight late at night. They might stand on the table and yell as loud as they can near the skylight. They can do all sorts of things, as long as it isn't television. Ma doesn't like it when Jack watches a lot of TV. She says it makes his brain rot.



Room
by Emma Donoghue.
Toronto, ON:
HarperCollins, 2010.

In the novel, which won the Commonwealth Prize and placed as a finalist in the Governor General's Awards, a man from outside the room comes to visit at night. He is Jack and Ma's only visitor. Donoghue admits that this work of fiction was inspired in part by the disturbing, true events involving Austrian Josef Fritzl, who imprisoned his daughter for 24 years.

"Nothing makes Ma scared. Except Old Nick maybe," says Jack. "Mostly she just calls him *him*, I didn't even know the name for him till I saw a cartoon about a guy that comes in the night called Old Nick" (12).

Nick brings food for Jack and Ma and takes the garbage outside with him. Jack has to stay inside the wardrobe until Nick leaves. Ma has never let Jack see Nick. She's afraid of what Nick might do.

"In Wardrobe I always try to squeeze my eyes tight and switch off fast so I don't hear Old Nick come, then I'll wake up and it'll be morning and I'll be in Bed with Ma . . . and everything OK," Jack says in the book.

Nick will bring in something special on Sundays. Jack has to tell Ma what he wants and then she'll ask Nick to buy it for "Sundaytreat." But the treat has to be something easy for Nick to get.

Jack doesn't understand this. Frustrated, he tells Ma he wanted birthday candles not Ma's painkillers for his treat. Why couldn't he have them?

"'I just mean, [Nick] might have to go to two or three stores, and that would make him cranky. And what if he didn't find the impossible thing? Then we wouldn't get Sunday treat at all,' Ma tells Jack (23)."

This is puzzling.

"[Nick] doesn't go in stores. Stores are in TV," Jack says, laughing at Ma's foolishness (23).

To Jack, the room is real and everything else, like the grass and other kids he's seen on their television, is pretend. There's the room, and then there's outer space but the more questions he asks, the more confusing things seem. Ma can't answer all of Jack's questions anymore. The room seems to be getting smaller all the time.

Jack's questions are the most revealing part of *Room*.

"I've always been religiously inclined but it doesn't come up in most of my books. I always knew it would be central to 'Room' because prisoners cling to whatever tatters of faith they've got."
– Emma Donoghue

His world seems ever so limited when he can't understand that there are other kids he could play with, besides on television, or that bread comes from fields rather than a bag. His innocence and spunk make the long list of questions, so characteristic of a five-year-old, a delight to read. I couldn't help but feel for Ma as she tried to answer them all. There aren't answers enough inside one room.

Safe as that room might seem to Jack, the room won't be big enough for him to grow. *Room* speaks to the bravery of a boy who can't stay in one room forever. Jack feels the same terror as any child, backpack on and lunch packed, feels going to school for the first time. His is the same nervousness of a young adult, left surrounded by boxes in their new dorm, after Mom and Dad's car has pulled away. It's that fluttering feeling that tells you you're growing up.

Ma comforts and pushes Jack. God does the same when we pray to him in front of the big elementary school doors or from a dorm room. He offers us peace and the courage to step out and be changed. It's for our own good.

When Jack leaves the room, Donoghue hints, it will be bewildering but it will be better.

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Features

Christian Courier is delighted to announce the winners of our Second Annual Children's Short Story Contest. The finalists were judged by Angela Bick, editor, Bert Witvoet, contributing editor, Nick Schuurman, review editor and Cathy Smith, features editor. We congratulate Naomi Dreise, our 1st place winner, who will receive a $50 gift certificate from Toys'R'Us and Evan Bremer, our 2nd place winner, who will receive a $25 gift certificate. Honourable Mentions go out to Mikella Chang and Jaden Bouwers for their excellent stories as well.

The Spring Fair

Naomi Dreise

Andrew and the other Spring Fair Committee members came right after I dismissed my class. We sat down and began to discuss the Spring Fair.

"I'll bring the ponies for the pony rides," said Mr. Peterson.

"Good. Miss Watson and Mrs. Garner will you two be the judges for the children's competitions?" asked Mr. Henderson.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Garner.

"Sure," replied Miss Watson, with a cute smile. I could tell she was sweet on Mr. Henderson.

"Then Mr. Garner, Mr. Corp and I will be the judges for the ladies' and men's competitions," said Mr. Henderson, smiling back at Miss Watson.

"That leaves Miss Alcott and Andrew for the best part of the fair – the dunk tank," said Mr. Henderson. I jerked my head up.

"Me? You want me to be in the dunk tank?" I said, shocked.

"Yes, but you can go in when the little children throw. Andrew will go in for the bigger children. Chances are you won't even get wet. You see, none of the little children will be able to hit the button," said Mr. Henderson. I looked at Andrew. He didn't look one bit shocked. He just smiled at me.

That night I was angry, angry that Mr. Henderson would choose me, a lady, to be in the dunk tank. Why didn't he choose a man? I put my books on my table. I prayed, "Dear God, help it to rain tomorrow." But then I thought that if it rained, it would ruin the fair. "Lord, please help it not to rain, but help none of the children to hit the button," I prayed instead.

I woke up the next morning early. I looked out my window. The sun was shining.

"Thank you, Lord. Thank you that the sun is shining," I prayed.

I had my breakfast and a cup of coffee, and went to my room to get ready. I thought about bringing an extra dress just in case I got wet, but decided not to. I packed a lunch, put on my shoes and started on my way to town. The sun was hot on my back.

"Sun is better than rain," I thought.

I heard horse hooves and turned around to see Andrew.

"Want a ride to town, Miss Alcott? It's still two miles," he asked.

I was going to refuse, but I thought – two miles is a long way to walk.

"All right," I replied.

Andrew gave me a hand up and I swung myself over the horse's back behind him. It did not take long to get to town. The town was decorated for the Spring Fair. Andrew stopped the horse once we got to the Fair. He jumped down off the horse and helped me down.

"Thank you."

"No problem," he said with a smile.

I looked around. There were a lot of people. The Fair began. First was the men's log-cutting competition. There were only five men. I noticed that Andrew was in the competition. Each time he swung, I saw his big muscles. He does look strong, I thought.

While I was eating my lunch, Andrew came up to me. I noticed that he had on a blue ribbon.

"Did you win the log-cutting competition?"

"Yeah, I did! Mr. Henderson told me to tell you that they are going to the dunk tank right after lunch."

"Okay. I'll be there," I replied.

"All right," he said with a smile.

"Would you like a sandwich? I have lots," I asked.

"Well..."

"I don't want them," I stated.

"Alright, I am hungry," Andrew said and sat down.

I climbed onto the seat of the dunk tank. The hem of my skirt fell down and dipped into the water. The water felt freezing cold.

"All children seven years or younger, please line up," said Mr. Henderson.

Children ran to line up. Luckily, none of the first children hit the button. Finally, the last child threw and missed. No dirty cold water for me!

"Close enough," Andrew stated and pushed the button. Down I went to the bottom of the ice-cold water.

"I made her go into the water, Mr. Drew!" cried the excited child who ran to find his parents. Mad, I started to climb out of the tank.

"May I help you down?" asked Andrew.

"No, you may not!" I snapped. All the older children lined up. Andrew sat down on the seat. I walked to the button and slammed it as hard as I could. Andrew went into the water and came up cold and very surprised.

He looked at me and I shouted, "And it looks like I got you, Mr. Drew!"

I turned and walked away.

"I'm sorry, Miss Alcott. I shouldn't have pushed the button. Can you forgive me?" I looked up to see Andrew standing there.

"I guess so," I answered with chattering teeth.

"CLANG, CLANG."

The bell for the evening prayer rang. I stood up.

"You look frozen. Do you want my coat?" Andrew asked.

"I'm fine," I mumbled.

"Are you sure?" he asked again.

"I said I'm fine," I snapped and walked to where the people were gathering.

"Why, if she ain't the most stubborn girl!" I heard Andrew whisper to himself. I was about to turn and give him a piece of my mind, but then regained control of myself and walked on.

A lady, not a girl!

By the time the prayer was done, I felt like an ice cube. I went to the tree where my stuff was and started to pack it up.

"Do you want a ride home?" Andrew questioned.

"No, thank you. I'd rather walk than ride with you!" I answered.

"Come on! You're just being stubborn! By the time you get home, it will be dark and you'll freeze to death! Besides, you said you forgave me!" Andrew replied.

"Fine, I'll ride with you. And by the way, I'm not the most stubborn girl in the world, though I might be the most stubborn lady!"

Naomi Dreise, 12, lives in Shallow Lake, Ontario, with her parents, three sisters and two brothers. She enjoys swimming, camping and skating. Her favourite author is Janette Oke.

The Big Boat

Evan Bremer

Lately there have been some really weird things happening in my neighbourhood. I'm not sure what's going on, but I hear a man and his sons talking, and hammering away at what looks like a big boat, but I don't see any water. I could be wrong. After all, it's hard to get a good view when you live as close to the ground as most of us hamsters do, and you haven't had a good day's sleep because the hammering is so noisy.

When I crept closer to the boat, I noticed a lot of other animals nearby, most who were also complaining about the noise keeping them awake. Many of these animals were bigger than me, and looked very scary. I thought some of them might even eat me as their lunch. There was a big orange animal with black stripes that was looking at me like he was hungry. I quickly moved behind the leg of a very tall grey animal with huge ears, who looked like he was afraid of me.

I decided to move away from the noise, thinking I could get a better sleep in a less crowded place. And then it happened – the hammering stopped and I heard the man say to his sons, "Praise God! It is done!" I ventured back to see this finished boat, when someone grabbed me and put me in a cage. I squeaked loudly because I was so scared. They brought me inside the big boat, and put me into a cage with another hamster they had caught. I was very scared, and surprised to see so many other animals already inside the boat. I heard many different sounds and it seemed like all of the animals wanted to talk at the same time. It was a very noisy boat.

I saw the big door to get inside the boat close, and suddenly it was very dark. Soon after the door was shut, it started to rain, and then came a thunder and lightning storm. I never felt so scared in my life. Then the boat jerked and began to move. I think we were floating on water, which seemed strange because when I first went into the boat, the land was very dry.

It rained for a long time, and all this while the animals and I lived inside the boat. The boat moved up and down with the waves, and there were many times when I felt a little seasick.

Finally the rain stopped. It became peaceful since I no longer heard the rain pounding on the roof. I heard the man talking with his sons and I think he said that it had rained forty days and forty nights.

During this storm, I got to know the other animals within the boat. Since we had been on the boat for so long, the man and his sons stopped locking all the cages so we had more room to walk about. I became friends with the big grey animal with huge ears, who told me that the reason he was scared of me was because he thought I would run up the inside of his trunk. The big orange animal with black stripes told me not to be afraid of him since the man had fed him very well. It was amazing that we all got along so well.

One night, after a peaceful sleep all day, there was a loud noise and it felt like the boat had crashed into something hard. I was worried because I thought the boat might start to sink and I would never see land again. However, the man and his sons seemed excited about the crash. The man even opened up a window and let my friend, Raven, out. Raven flew back and forth from the ark because it couldn't land anywhere.

Later on, I noticed that the man again opened a window and let Dove go free, but Dove returned after a short while. Perhaps Dove missed the man. A few days later, I watched as the man let Dove fly out the

continued on p. 11

Ordinary Christian radicals

Seth Veenstra

Ian and Jared are two active church members, community activists, and ordinary radicals. As Shane Claiborne might say, seeds of "holy mischief" have been planted in their hearts by the gospel. Ian self-identifies as a Christian anarchist. Expanding, he explains that he does not acknowledge the state's authority, nor does he seek the status quo's affirmation: "For me as a Christian anarchist, it's Christian first, then anarchist." Jared is more hesitant to define himself in the same manner. "I am a Christian," says Jared. He emphasizes his identity in Christ before explaining that an anarchist philosophy shapes the way he lives out the gospel.

I meet Ian in the FRWY (The Freeway), a Hamilton cafe that doubles as a community outreach centre for the Salvation Army. It's a fitting locale. Ian's work as a lay pastor involves ministering to persons on the fringes of society – health care survivors or those with mental illnesses. I ask him when he became a radical. He responds, "Some of us are born with that potential more than others." Then he adds, "It's [also] the way we're nurtured."

The Freeway (FRWY) cafe and community outreach centre in Hamilton, Ontario.

Ian was raised in a close-knit Mennonite community. His family didn't own a home. Instead, the five of them lived in a friend's basement. His mother wanted to be home with the kids and his father had "no patience for bosses" – which meant employment was often sporadic. Ian remembers being aware both of his family's poverty and that they were well taken care of by their church. For him, this was a formative experience in becoming an anarchist. Looking back, he regards his parents' choices as a rebellion against the status quo and he sees his church community's involvement as part of the resistance effort.

Jared grew up in the CRC, but is now studying to become a minister in the Mennonite church. His upbringing also differed from the norm, largely due to his parents' work in Haiti as missionaries. Jared's journey into Christian radicalism began at a convention for a national political party. In high school, Jared participated in the youth branch of the party. When he went to the convention, he became disillusioned. It was just "a lot of posturing and kids drinking on [party] money," he says.

Around the same time, one of Jared's friends "came out as an anarchist." Jared had a hard time understanding why this friend could not believe in politics or in voting. The following year however, a bill was introduced to reform Canada's electoral system. When the process "failed miserably," Jared started to see his friend's point of view: "Nobody cared to look at what it [the bill] was, or what it would do." He gave up: "If you can't change that, then there's no hope for working within the system. It seems like there's no point."

Epiphanies: locating the heart of darkness

Jared's epiphany is one at the heart of anarchist philosophy: society is sick. In *BeanZine*, a grassroots magazine that Jared and his wife help publish, Jared defines the state as "'The topmost part of the political body' which absorbs the power [of] the people through coercion for its general will – which is to maintain order and the common good." It is this view of the state that led Jared and Ian to their shared anarchist perspective. "As long as the state uses violence and coercion, I have to be an anarchist," says Ian.

If Jared's epiphany occurred when he encountered an impotent political system, Ian recognized the symptoms of a sick society when he himself became ill. "I was being failed and abused by a medical system that is patriarchal," he says. At seventeen, he had bouts where he could not stop vomiting. The doctors were at a loss and his illness went undiagnosed for seven years. Finally he received an answer: cyclical vomiting syndrome. While the diagnosis may have been empowering initially, treatment options were limited. "I was only being offered tests that very likely will shorten [my] life," says Ian. "I ate more than one radioactive sandwich." Health professionals would trace the effects through his digestive system.

Ian describes a long road of conflict with the medical establishment: "... going to Emergency, vomiting blood, and then having the police called because I wouldn't leave." Eventually he stopped going: "They just wanted to pump you full of saline and get you discharged."

Another problematic trend in the health care system, Ian notes, is the amount of demographic information logged before you are asked about your medical history. Ian's realization recalls the words of Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard: "No mistake or crime is more horrible to God than those committed by power. Why? Because what is official is impersonal, and being impersonal is the greatest insult that can be paid a person." The Christian anarchist philosopher, Jacques Ellul, puts it equally bluntly: "There can be no political power without tyranny." While this may seem extreme, it is a sentiment that flows naturally from the core belief held by many radicals: people are by nature good; it is society alone that is corrupt.

Jacques Ellul

Reformed Christians do not embrace this stark division. They argue that sin infects every aspect of the world – not just society or culture – but individuals and communities, too. Although Christian anarchists seem aware of the problems inherent in their core premise, their focus tends to remain on how society impacts individuals, and not the other way around.

According to Christian radicals, the church is not immune to the top-down influence. For example, Ian points out that Mennonites developed their own successful economy within Canada, which, in turn, gave them substantial financial security. Thus, this counter-cultural people were nonetheless shaped by the more dominant liberal capitalist culture. "The wealth, education, and freedom Canadian Mennonites have experienced in the past century were unexpected," he says. "There was no discussion about what we do when this happens – when we have this power."

Ian claims that what was perceived as "successful" in the professional and academic lives of Mennonites was appropriated and used to structure their church life. "In my home church, I'm on the Peace and Social Concerns Committee and we get appointed by the Gifts and Discernment Committee and both of these groups report to the Ministry Council. This doesn't really allow for the movement of the Holy Spirit necessarily." He concludes, "The church has very intentionally taken on the ways of the world because they were better than the previous situations."

While a Reformed worldview might suggest that the "ways of the world" still have redeeming characteristics, the trend towards institutionalization of the church is one that Ian and Jared consider dangerous. In striving to make the work of the church more efficient, by drawing distinct lines between one responsibility and another, Christian individuals and communities begin to shirk their personal responsibility.

See **Christian radicals** *p. 12*

The Big Boat *...continued from p. 10*

window again. This time he came back with a twig that had a leaf on it, and I could tell the man was very excited about this twig.

A few weeks later, Dove was sent out again, but this time he did not return. The man announced to his sons that it was now time to open the door of the boat and allow all the animals to go free. What a wonderful day that was! You cannot imagine how excited I was when the door finally opened, or how much the sunlight hurt my eyes since they had seen nothing but dark for such a long time.

Once my eyes began to focus, I looked around outside the boat. Everything was so beautiful, and it felt like a warm spring day. The trees had buds that were just beginning to open up, the grass was very green, and there were many different kinds of flowers blooming. It was very different from the rocky, dry ground that I knew before getting on the boat. The best part was that my new friends and I were free to leave the boat and explore this new land.

I wanted to thank the man for taking such good care of me and my friends, but he was very busy piling stones up on each other. I heard him say that he was building an altar to the Lord to thank Him for caring for all of us.

I looked around this beautiful new world and found a perfect new home in a small cave, where I am still living. Sometimes during the day, when I am awakened by a storm of lightning and thunder, I get scared just like always. However, when the sun comes out right after the storm I see wonderful colours light up the sky, and I know that things will be alright.

Evan Bremer, 9, attends Dundas Calvin Christian School. He enjoys sports, especially basketball, flag football, swimming, and soccer. He also likes spending time with his family and going for walks with his dog, Taz.

Christian radicals ...continued from p.11

Good Samaritans by proxy

As an example, Jared points to history and the institutional places of rest for travelers created by the church. The unintended effect of this compassion was that the larger body of Christ started to direct poor and hungry folks to the "specialists." Whether it is the abundance of committees or displacement of responsibility to "specialists," the concern voiced by these two radicals is the same. As Ian says, "Everybody should be living the full life of Christ."

This begs the question, "How are Christian radicals living the full life of Christ?" Or more specifically: "How do Christian anarchists think Christians should respond to the sick society they find themselves living in?"

Jared and Ian are eager to talk about their work in activism, community-building and culture-creating, but the idea of "speaking truth to power" predominates. "Anarchism – I think – ought to be about undoing oppressions by grace, and by love, and patience; but also by naming that [oppression]," says Ian. "And that's tenuous in Christianity – to name things is not always seen as graceful."

"We are more inclined as westerners to read the Bible as Jesus taking on the priestly and kingly characteristics rather than the prophetic ones," says Jared. When we start talking about what prophesy means, he narrows in on the word "apocalyptic." He describes "apocalypse" as an unmasking or unveiling. In our apocalyptic age, both oppressive societies and our oppressive natures are constantly being exposed. Every Christian can participate in these moments of apocalypse; they can do so by speaking the truth to power.

One of the challenges in speaking the truth to power is to remember to have the humility to turn the lens inward. "The truth can't have any of your own oppressive tendencies involved in it," says Ian. "Speaking truth to power is one of the most pristine manifestations of anarchism because you're trying to undo [the oppressive tendencies in] yourself."

Another challenge is deciding where to position yourself when addressing oppression, especially as it's embodied within the state. For Ian and Jared, this truth-telling comes from a position that is counter-cultural, distanced from the state, and could, in fact, be termed anti-state. When I ask Jared if he thinks the biblical message conflicts with obedience to the state, he is prepared. "I think so. Simply because we live in a militaristic society. I think what we're talking about is violence on a daily level and the way the government seeks to solve its problems is through violence."

While there is a long tradition of the church supporting the state, an alternative thread also exists. "There has always been a Christian anarchism," writes Ellul. It may have been easier to identify in the first three centuries perhaps, but a subversive undercurrent has always manifested itself in church history. Ellul draws on Vernard Eller and the Anabaptist tradition to support his argument.

A secular writer on anarchism also notes the link to the Anabaptist tradition. Vincent Ward argues that many anarchists today want to redeem one of the oldest of the American Dreams, a Puritan tradition that stresses "community, decentralization, self-sufficiency, mutual aid and face-to-face democracy."

Applying ideals

The Anabaptist tradition has not always lived up to its radical ideals. Jared notes that when Mennonites emigrated to the Americas, fleeing societies that persecuted them, they became complicit in the oppression of their hosting government: the act of allocating land for Mennonite communities displaced indigenous peoples. Ian comments on a more recent trend of complicity. "In my life, more and more Mennonites are joining the military – are joining the police – and maintaining church membership." It is mind-boggling to him that the church that shaped his anti-state theology also shaped individuals with a desire to volunteer for security and law enforcement at the G20 summit. In an article in *BeanZine*, Jared also addresses the policing of the Toronto G20 event: "Who commits the greater crime," he writes, "grassroots political organizers trying to push justice to the forefront of a complacent public conscience, whose actions include but are not limited to 'acts of vandalism against exploitative corporate and State targets,' or the State, protecting the right of the richest countries to have closed talks about the future of the world's economy – which currently leaves more people impoverished and enslaved than ever before?" Jared and Ian find the media portrayal of anarchists, demonizing them as "terrorists" or patronizing them as "kids," to be inaccurate and over-simplified. As coverage of the recent Vancouver riots suggest, "anarchy" is synonymous with looting. " 'Anarchists' – we are told – are little more than angry vandals," they point out.

When confronted with the views of Christian anarchists and their focus on the symptoms of a sick society, those of us who might lean towards a different Christian interpretation are left with two question-filled tasks: how do we make sense of the symptoms and can we contribute to the cure?

To use Reformed language, we are faced with the challenge of discerning both the structure and direction of political bodies. Al Wolters writes, "Structure denotes the 'essence' of a creaturely thing, the kind of creature it is by virtue of God's creational law. Direction, by contrast, refers to a sinful deviation from that structural ordinance and renewed conformity to it in Christ."

Rather than envisioning the structure of the state as one pure platonic ideal, Reformed thinkers see a creational order undergirding the various embodiments of state throughout time. We know that simply to say there is a *divine design* for the state can be dangerous, elevating the state too much, granting it carte blanche to exert authority without accountability. A better view is to picture a horizontal landscape that places the state alongside family, the work place and the church. Such an arrangement avoids the totalitarian tendencies that occur when one sphere tries to control other spheres of creation.

In one way, Christian radicals are employing a Reformed worldview. They sense the perversion of a God-created design for society; they abhor the twisting of structural norms. Their anti-state perspective speaks to the state's totalitarian tendencies; their anti-capitalist perspective resists the oppressive effects of large corporations exerting power over society.

I can imagine that it is difficult for Reformed Christians to embrace the ideas of Christian radicals. While a Reformed worldview recognizes limits on the state's power, it does not desire to strip the state of all power. Totalitarianism should be opposed, yes; but not by rejecting the state outright. Instead, the state should be pushed by all Christians to rediscover its God-ordained purpose as well as its boundaries. Or, in Ian and Jared's words, we, too, have a responsibility to speak truth to power.

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Voice for the voiceless: *Shane Claiborne*

Cathy Smith

Some time ago our pastor used a video clip of Shane Claiborne to illustrate his sermon. Claiborne, with bandanna, dreadlocks and scruffy beard, said something to this effect: We see poverty and urban decay and degradation all around us. And we think, Why doesn't God step in and do something? Well, he did. He sent us to go and do something.

It was a simple call, delivered with sincerity. I wanted to know more about this unusual pastor. Like Rob Bell, Shane Claiborne is something of a sensation. He is a writer and speaker who has been featured on CNN and in high-profile journals. His books have titles like *Jesus for President* and *The Irresistible Revolution.*

His education and ministry are varied. He studied at Eastern University and Princeton. He has ministered alongside Mother Theresa in Calcutta and at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. He is the founder of The Simple Way in Philadelphia, a faith community that seeks to address the needs of the inner-city.

Here's a sample from an article Claiborne wrote for *Esquire* (**esquire.com/features/best-and-brightest-2009/shane-claiborne-1209**):

In fact, the entire story of Jesus is about a God who did not just want to stay "out there" but who moves into the neighborhood, a neighborhood where folks said, "Nothing good could come." It is this Jesus who was accused of being a glutton and drunkard and rabble-rouser for hanging out with all of society's rejects, and who died on the imperial cross of Rome reserved for bandits and failed messiahs. This is why the triumph over the cross was a triumph over everything ugly we do to ourselves and to others. It is the final promise that love wins.

It is this Jesus who was born in a stank [sic] manger in the middle of a genocide. That is the God that we are just as likely to find in the streets as in the sanctuary, who can redeem revolutionaries and tax collectors, the oppressed and the oppressors... a God who is saving some of us from the ghettos of poverty, and some of us from the ghettos of wealth.

While some see Claiborne and others like him as emerging leaders who are impacting the way we will "do church" in the future, pioneers of a movement dubbed The New Monasticism, others downplay their uniqueness and influence. In his *Christianity Today* (September 2010) cover story, Hipster Christians, Brett McCracken has this to say: "The latest incarnation of a decades-long collision of 'cool' and 'Christianity,' hipster Christianity is in large part a rebellion against the very subculture that birthed it. It's a rebellion against old-school evangelicalism and its fuddy-duddy legalism, apathy about the arts, and pitiful lack of concern for social justice. It's also a rebellion against George W. Bush-style Christianity: American flags in churches, the Ten Commandments in courtrooms, and evangelical leaders who get too involved in conservative politics, such as James Dobson and Jerry Falwell.

"The new subculture of young evangelicals – I call them 'Christian hipsters' – grew up on Contemporary Christian music (CCM), Focus on the Family's Adventures in Odyssey, flannel graphs, vacation Bible school, and hysteria about the end times. Now all of that is laughable to them, as they attempt to burn away the kitschy dross of the megachurch Christianity of their youth – with its emphasis on 'soul-winning' at the expense of everything else – and trade it for something with real-world gravitas."

Cathy Smith is features editor for CC *and lives in Wyoming, Ont.*

Columns

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it'

For those of us old enough to have grown up when Christianity still strongly manifested itself in North American and even European culture, the world today can be disconcerting. The outlook for the church – as an institution and as believers (the Body of Christ) – looks bleak.

In the U.S., two-thirds of the population self-identifies as Christian (certainly some percentage nominal). But among the media purveyors of news and entertainment the percentage of Christians drops to virtually nil. So the world and its goings-on as reported to us and opined about tend to give the public the impression that Christian faith is pretty much dead, and good riddance.

One recent example: in the immediate aftermath of New York State having passed a gay "marriage" law, our local newspaper carried an editorial that essentially told readers they would have to agree with that law "unless [they] don't like human rights, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence." The paper didn't even bother to make a case. The editorial assumed that the rightness of the issue is so self-evident to "enlightened" people that it doesn't even warrant discussion, and certainly not moral arguments based on faith.

They have accepted the pernicious claim of modern secularism that faith (like homosexuality) is simply a private, personal preference. There is no unchanging God-ordained standard for human life – no natural law, as Catholics would call it. Thus, faith and its moral claims should certainly not be operative in the public square, nor should it impinge on anyone but yourself, if you happen to embrace it. Ironically, many editorialists nationwide loudly trumpet secular causes they agree with, "private" or not, but never anything they perceive as related to Christian faith.

What's right in your own eyes

Sadly, secularists who claim to have no faith are not the only people who believe that faith shouldn't rock the public boat. A disturbing number of self-identified Christians also do. The let-me-do-my-thing, don't-try-to-change-me attitude has infected many churches. It's one thing to telegraph that attitude to fellow human beings. It's quite another to tell God he should mind his own business. Yet the fact that many churches are doing that is evident in how they approach Scripture. And it is proving to be their demise as institutions.

If there are parts of the Bible you dislike or that are an ill fit with your view of modern life and science (the prohibitions against homosexual behavior, God's destroying of Israel's pagan neighbors, the existence of hell, the Creation story, et al) you can dismiss those parts by saying that the Bible may contain the Word of God but is not the Word.

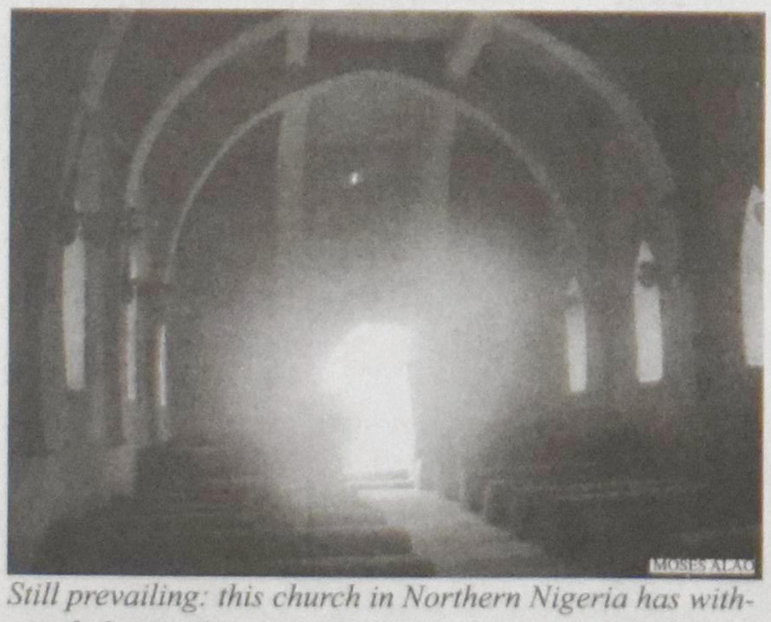
But in God's reality that path is a slippery slope to doom. If not even God can require obedience of us, the creatures he created in his own image, then we may as well, indeed, discard our faith and simply do what is right in our own eyes (as the book of Judges tells us ancient Israel did, to their peril).

I'm not being melodramatic. In my decades as a church-music director I've worked in a number of mainline parishes in different denominations. I've experienced this first-hand and all too often. Not only does it result in hearing really lousy sermons every week (the equivalent to "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" essays), but it buries any evangelistic impulse (why spread the Good News if it's questionable there actually is any Gospel to which Jesus is both lock and key?).

It also turns the church inward. So in such congregations you'll see fundraisers to renovate the stained glass, paint the basement or even to buy a new organ. Only after that might you see helping out the neighbors, near or far. On the other hand, without deep thought and often led by an activist pastor or priest (they have to have some cause to be activist about if it isn't the Gospel), such churches not uncommonly embrace the current secular social trends of the left.

I see signs of this beginning to encroach into my own Reformed denomination, a church that is still perceived to be more evangelical than mainline but whose "Reformedness" is fading. Being Reformed is not important in itself, but it has historically meant taking God and his Word – all of his Word – very seriously.

I fervently pray that wherever that is true God will burn away that dross with his refiner's fire, from individuals, congregations, denominations – his whole Body. Such divine correction, though painful, should be welcomed. It will drag us back to the Narrow Road. And Jesus himself assures us that, however things may seem, when the church is thinking, breathing and living the air of God's Word and Spirit, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).



Still prevailing: this church in Northern Nigeria has withstood almost 100 years of religious tension.

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Artful Eye

Marianne VanderSpek is a photographer and farmer living near Florence, Ont.

Kantha

Hindu texts say
the universe is a continuous fabric woven by the gods
and the lord of tatters returns a whole cloth
in exchange for a rag.
The unschooled women in Bengali
unspool discarded saris
to recount their lives in kantha embroidery.
Forbidden even to speak their husbands' names,
their voices are heard
as soft and persistent as mourning doves
in every stitch.

The freedom quilts of North America called out
from slave to slave.
Lacking books,
they read the constellations of cotton and thread,
color and shape:
a language unknown to their learned masters.

When the quilters of Gee's Bend
pieced together the ragged slices of their lives into whole cloth,
they were not thinking
they would be praised for their ability
to combine survival and beauty.
It was just what you did:
it is more than the body that needs to survive.

Every day I stitch words together.
Hunched over paper,
I join phrases in blocks,
join shape to shape
contrast light to dark
striving for the transcendence of those women
with their calloused hands and curved spines.

Reprinted from *Here, on the Ground* with permission.

Marianne Jones (mjones@tbaytel.net) is the 2011 Poet Laureate of Utmost Christian Writers. Her most recent work, Here, on the Ground, *was a 2011 Word Guild winner. Copies can be ordered from FriesenPress, Amazon.ca, or directly from her. She and her husband live in Thunder Bay, Ont.*

Columns

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

Mentoring the Pastor

One of my volunteer church duties is coming to an end. I'm not sure how it came about, actually, but I've been mentoring my pastor for about four years. I think the pastor asked council for a couple of mentors and my name came up. Regardless, it's been very enlightening for me to look at the pastor and his role in our church through a mentoring eye, and to strive to be the kind of person who is willing to advise, assist and guide him in his work. Soon he will be leaving our church family and heading out west to serve High River CRC in Alberta. It's time to take stock.

Over the years, our dialogue took various forms. We were frequently in touch via e-mail. I'm the bulletin editor, so we had many quick chats and on-the-run conversations at church. We also met a few times with a more intentional list of topics to discuss. Obviously, we didn't touch upon council business other than what was already being shared with the congregation by way of council reports, and we didn't discuss confidential matters. Even so, there was a lot to share.

Here's an abbreviated list of the help I offered in my mentoring role: I critiqued sermons, made sermon topic suggestions, outlined our church's history and clarified complicated family connections, advised on time management, shared reading suggestions, proposed liturgy ideas, opined on a myriad of details from church décor to bulletin covers to involvement in denominational matters, sent notes of encouragement, listened to a few frustrations, made a power point presentation to accompany a sermon series, and acted as a sounding board for plans and ideas.

Feedback 101

My very first mentoring activity was to write a long note listing twelve different things that I thought the pastor was doing really well. That list ran the gamut from moving the pastor's office from the parsonage to the church (a wise and necessary change) to his attire (appropriate) and interaction style (personable). With a little time and trust, I also found the courage to point out areas for pastoral growth, too. I still think that's the correct order: encouragement should take precedence over criticism. My final mentoring activity will be to create a slideshow about his years of service in our church, a farewell gesture that will hopefully serve as an appropriate bookend to the list I wrote at the beginning of our relationship.

You'll have to ask my pastor whether I was actually a help or a hindrance as a mentor. What interests me more is what I learned from being a mentor! Ironic, isn't it? I listened to sermons and congregational prayers with a more attentive ear. I saw connections in the liturgy that might have escaped me before. I prayed for the pastor and his family more often and more intentionally than I ever had in the past. I discovered that the pastor's job is elusive, a quicksilvered prey that you can hunt for, but never quite pin down. My guess is that in every church it will be a markedly different animal.

In short, I learned a much greater appreciation for pastors. I saw how even the most carefully scheduled planner could be ripped apart by tragedy, accident and death. I saw how demands for the pastor's time and expertise come from every quarter… from the congregation, from the denomination, from the community. I saw how impossible it is to please everyone.

Being a mentor is one thing. It may or may not have been useful to the pastor. I hope it was. There were some grey areas and boundaries that were hard to negotiate. But being a friend is not negotiable. Befriend your pastor. Jesus said: Love your neighbour as yourself. That includes the shepherd who's trying to shepherd you.

A fruitful mentorship.

Meanwhile, at our church, soon we will be turning our attention to calling another pastor. There will be the usual comments like "I hope we can find a good one" or "I hear so-and-so is good." I will let those remarks remind me to be a "good" parishioner, one that a pastor would be equally excited and happy to meet and to partner with in service to our Saviour and Lord, the Great Shepherd.

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Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Re-installing joy under the summer sun

"Remember the years we used to go on fishing holidays?" asked a good friend recently.

"Yes, I remember those years. We still drop by the campsite and cottage resort when we are in the neighborhood," I said.

"Weren't they awful?" she added.

"Awful?" I asked. "That's not how I remember them."

"Don't you remember the hard times we had with little kids in tow?"

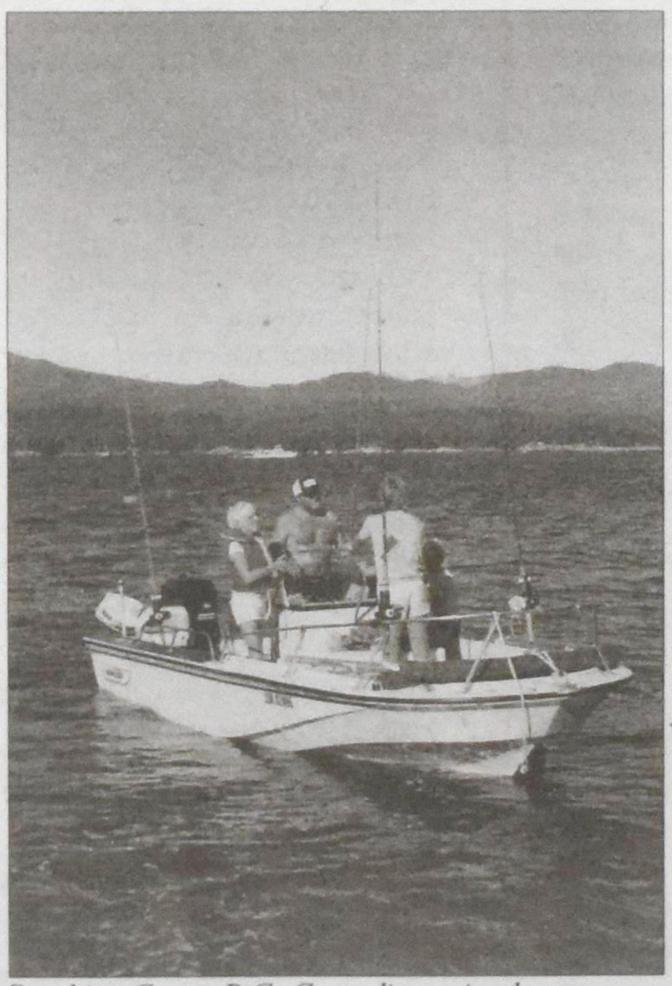
"Yes. "

"How about the time your spouse came back from fishing at the very last minute and you had to pack up all on your own and it was raining? Don't you remember that?"

"Yes, I remember that. We certainly had some hard times. If you go year after year there are bound to be some of those moments. But that is not what I remember now. I remember all the good times we had. There was always excitement in the air and we had many more good than hard times," I added.

Human nature?

How many of us have conversations such as that with long-time friends when the kids are grown, and realize we feel totally different about shared experiences?



Sunshine Coast, B.C: Crew discussing best possible fishing spots of the day.

My friend, however, is quite normal. Many of us remember negative experiences more quickly than positive ones. This could be human nature or personality type. And, if we are honest, we would agree – joy comes and goes. Here today and gone tomorrow.

Practically speaking, however, joy is often the first to go when we experience challenges in our lives. This column is not about putting on a positive face when experiencing the loss of loved ones, facing life-threatening diseases or suffering the loss of one's work through being fired or laid off. These type of true sorrows need to be mourned. Instead, I am referring to the everyday misunderstandings, struggles and obstacles that are simply part of human life.

Negative emotions colour our life

We can experience more joy in life when we learn to acknowledge and manage our negative emotions. First, we need to invite these emotions into our hearts and learn to sit with them for a while. If we pretend they do not exist, the feelings will exaggerate over time and pop up when least expected, colouring our lives in unhelpful ways.

Second, once we acknowledge these negative emotions, we are on the road to managing them by retelling the story in a way that moves us away from the past (that keeps us in a painful place) into the future. While we may want to blame the other person (I was young then and stayed angry and silent for three days) it may be more fruitful to take ownership of at least some aspect of the issue. That way we put emphasis on what we *can* or *cannot* control. In regards to the fishing holiday, I learned to remind my spouse that, when he goes fishing in similar circumstances, I need him to be back in time to do his share of the packing. Or we make another plan that will work for both of us.

Third, once we begin to retell the story, we are ready to train our mind to focus on the good times the fishing holiday brought us. If we learn to do this habitually, we will program more joy into the neural pathways of our brain and over time have more happy memories of years gone by. And there is no better way to honor our creator than to live a life sprinkled with joy and stirred with gratitude.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Columns

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

Forgive us our debts

Debts have been very much in the news lately, with Greece grandstanding the show. Its government, ever since this ancient country joined the Euro block, has acted like a sugar daddy to its citizens. Money was cheap, so the politicians shared it liberally, putting half the population on the public payroll. One hospital had 16 landscapers on its staff but no garden. The Railroads' overhead was so large that it would have been cheaper to cart its passengers by taxi.

Now it is crunch time, not so much for Greece – although them too – but especially for the banks that loaned the funds. If Greece goes broke (and it will sooner or later), then banks everywhere go belly-up too, that's why Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bernanke (U.S.), Chancellor Merkel (Germany) and President Sarkozy (France) have been kicking that can up the debt-mountain, hoping that economic growth – the capitalistic concept that has done the trick in the past – will do its magic again. Someday soon, however, that can will reach the top, signifying goodbye to a sensible money solution. Crunch-time is coming.

Actually there's nothing new in our world today. Politicians never want to rock the boat, never want to disturb the electorate; instead, they always act as if nothing is the matter, always tell us that tomorrow will be better. That was true once, perhaps, but not anymore.

Thomas L. Friedman, a *New York Times* columnist, wrote: "You really do have to wonder whether a few years from now we'll look back at the first decade of the 21st century – when food prices spiked, energy prices soared, world population surged, tornados plowed through cities, floods and droughts set records, populations were displaced and governments were threatened by the confluence of it all – and ask ourselves: What were we thinking? How did we not panic when the evidence was so obvious that we'd crossed some growth/climate/natural resource/population redlines all at once?"

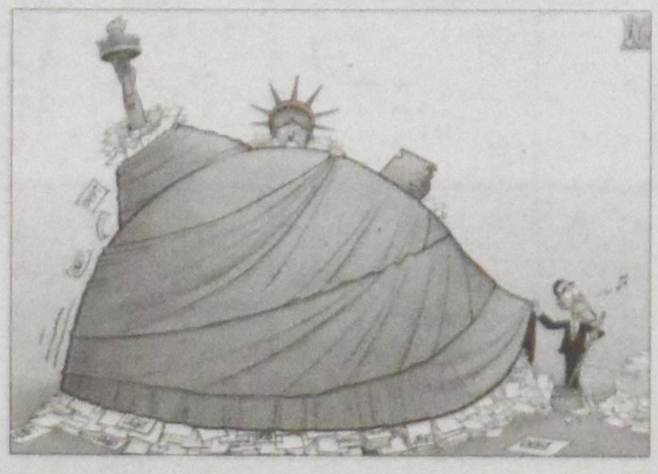
Our prayer should constantly be "Forgive us our debts, our growth-at-any-cost- debts; our climate debts; our natural resources debts." These debts are much more god-forsaken acts than our money debts, which now are increasingly mere computer screen figures, making money measures meaningless.

Destroyed by the sanity of experts

As Dr. Chris Martenson writes, "On a pure debt, deficit, and liability basis, the U.S., much of Europe, and Japan are all well past the point of no return. No matter what policy tweaks, tax and benefit adjustments, or spending cuts are made – individually or in combination – nothing really pencils out to anything that remotely resembles a solution that would allow us to return to business as usual.

"At the heart of it all, the developed nations blew themselves a gigantic credit bubble, which fed all kinds of grotesque distortions, of which housing is perhaps the most visible poster child. However, outsized government budgets and promises, overconsumption of nearly everything imaginable, bloated college tuition costs and rising prices in healthcare utterly disconnected from economics are other symptoms, too. There's no possibility of a return of generally rising living standards for most of the developed world. A new era is upon us" (quoted from his article entitled *Death by Debt).*

Nobody knows the exact figure, but some reliable estimates put the per-household debt in the U.S. at $650,000 for government debt alone, not counting personal liabilities. The monetary debt is so big that either the borrower or the lender will have to take a substantial cut, because a debt is always paid. The borrower will only be able to pay if there is astronomical inflation, where a loaf of bread might cost a thousand dollars. If it is up to the lender (the governments and their banks), they will have to declare bankruptcy. Either way, we all become third world citizens, reduced to scrounging and scraping, because we have lived far beyond our means.



Our daily prayer must be ever more fervently to "Forgive us our debts." Robert Guelich, in his monumental 450 page book dealing solely with *The Sermon on the Mount,* (Matt. 5-7) comments on Matthew 6:12, saying that the word for debt reflects a common Aramaic metaphor for a sin drawn from the commercial realm. For today, this means that money has become the ultimate destroyer: woods paved, mountains mined, seas eaten, species eliminated, all because of our senseless quest for growth at the expense of everything that is holy. In *Russia House,* Le Carré writes that "When the world is destroyed, it will be destroyed not by its madmen, but by the sanity of its experts and the superior knowledge of its bureaucrats."

"Forgive us our debts . . . ."

Bert Hielema lives a leisurely life in not-always-tranquil Tweed. He welcomes comments at bert@hielema.ca.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Loving like Jesus

To be honest, when I picked up *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike response to homosexuality* by W.P. Campbell, I wondered how different it could be from the dozen or so books I have already read on the issue of homosexuality. But I was pleasantly surprised. I couldn't put the book down, and ear-marked a couple dozen pages. I will read it again.

The author's thesis is that "the contrasting colours of the law and the gospel, grace and instruction, truth and love must be blended if we are to understand God's mind and God's heart" on the topic of homosexuality (p.17).

I particularly like the analogies that Campbell uses to draw us into the water of this particular issue. He describes the body of Christ, using the feet, heart and head as ways to understand where we may be in the journey of ministry to those who struggle with same sex issues. We are asked to look at our church as the body of Christ and to evaluate where we are in the journey of ministry. It is not merely an "us" versus "them" idea, but rather we are asked to first look at ourselves. To recognize our own broken places before we look at others.

"The leaders we need are not those who give in to their weaknesses, but those who humbly trust God for the strength to be obedient," Campbell writes. "In the realm of sexuality, leaders in the church must model faithfulness to God's creative norm, despite struggles they may face as singles who never find mates or as persons locked into marriages that for physiological or psychological reasons preclude sexual expression. Jesus Christ, who was never sexually active, enables us to find deep intimacy and fulfillment in relationships, even when sexual expression must be curtailed. The Bible showcases singleness, along with marriage, as a holy calling from God (Matt. 19:10-12, 27-30; 1 Cor. 7) (p.49).

Overcoming controversy

The second half of the book offers the meat of the issue. Here, Campbell delves into science, APA, theology, interpretation, holiness, grace and truth. Each chapter begins with a controversy, and throughout the chapter the reader is asked to visit that controversy and question his or her own position on the continuum of thought regarding homosexuality. Campbell gives insight into various positions on the issue of homosexuality, and ends each chapter with a challenge in the benediction, again calling us to look at ourselves first.

"Every time I meet a person who suffers from addiction, I realize this could have been me. The person who carries the wounds of past abuse could have been me. By the grace of God I am still "on the wagon," and it is only grace that will keep me there. I want to extend the same grace to everyone I meet, remembering that where sin is abundant, God's grace is more abundant (Romans 5:20) (p. 133).

Building ministry

The final section talks about the blueprint of ministry for various church sizes and structures. Campbell outlines a sphere with six areas to model a strong ministry structure. He uses the story of Nehemiah and the walls around a city to focus the metaphor. The comparison allowed me to think about the strategies that God has given us as examples to use for any ministry. It can help us to look at the structures we have in place and see what we may be lacking in our ministries and church communities. It gives the important reminder to place prayer as the foundation and motivation for all ministry. As I read this section, I kept thinking, "My pastor needs to read this."

The book also provides questions for each chapter, making it a great resource for small groups wanting to delve deeper into the understanding of same sex attraction and the call to offer hope, grace, truth and much love to those we call our neighbours. In conclusion, I highly recommend this book. It is concise and offers a lot of insight for everyone in the body of Christ. It isn't an in-depth theological, psychological, or scientific book, but it does offer a better perspective on the Christlike response to homosexuality. In our culture today, none of us can remain naive regarding the issue of homosexuality; rather, we are called to be well-informed and equipped to love like Jesus.

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OPINION

Taxes as tithing?

Chandra Pasma

As Christians, we sometimes think of tithing like an income tax. In fact, I sat through one church presentation which not only told us what percent of our income was expected by the church, but specified that it was pre-tax income and pointed out which line on our income tax forms we should be using to calculate our tithe!

But have you ever thought of it the other way around? Could taxes be a form of tithing? It might seem heretical at first – after all, Jesus said "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." But it's been a long time since taxes have been paid to Caesar as a form of imperial tribute. Taxes now form the basis of a democratic and representative government and the programs and services it provides.

Here's how we might think about it: as citizens, we recognize that we are not solely responsible for the wealth that we generate, nor does it belong to us alone. We are grateful for the gifts that God has blessed us with, mindful of the contribution of our society and community in helping us to use our resources to create income and wealth, and cognizant of the benefits we receive from creation. Therefore, we share a portion of the income that we receive as an expression of our gratitude and a contribution towards the sustainability of our community and collective care for creation.

In other words, as part of a community, we share in a common wealth. We benefit from infrastructure and knowledge paid for and developed by previous generations that we should in turn maintain and develop for future generations. By pooling together our resources, we are all able to afford quality programs and services that we probably couldn't afford if we had to pay for them individually. And we are also intimately tied together in our community such that the well-being of each of our members affects the well-being of the whole community. Through our taxes, therefore, we contribute to the common wealth and the well-being of our community.

From a public justice perspective, taxes help to create a democratic, just and equitable society by empowering the government in its public justice task. As citizens, paying our taxes is one way we can contribute to public justice and the common good.

A fair system?

For the past decade, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have made deep cuts to Canada's tax system. Because of the loss of revenue, these cuts have resulted in the loss of important government programs and services, in addition to contributing to our deficit since 2009.

Equally important, these cuts have resulted in a tax system that is less progressive than before. The principle of progressive taxation – that people should pay taxes according to their ability to contribute – is a basic public justice tenet. It is of great concern then that the overall tax system is now an inverted u-shape, with those at the top of the income distribution paying a lower rate than those at the bottom!

This loss of progressivity in our tax system contributes to growing income inequality. Income inequality should be of concern to every Canadian, since evidence shows that more unequal countries suffer a host of social problems, including greater health problems and lower life expectancy, higher rates of mental illness, higher crime rates, more teen pregnancies, increased drug use, and lower social trust. These problems are experienced in greater number by every income bracket in an unequal society – not just the poor!

Perhaps the most worrisome trend, however, is the complete lack of public debate over what levels of taxation are fair and appropriate. The recent budget focused solely on spending cuts to deal with the fiscal deficit, despite the fact that opinion polls consistently show that a majority of Canadians are opposed to the costly corporate tax cuts. Canadians need and deserve an honest, transparent debate about taxes that takes into account not only who pays taxes and how much but the public services and programs that they pay for.

Ultimately, taxes are about what kind of country we want: with citizenship, we get what we pay for. We need to start having conversations about our tax system that focus on the values we share as Canadians and the kind of country we want to live in.

Chandra Pasma is a policy analyst with Citizens for Public Justice, a Christian public policy organization based in Ottawa.

For more information on fair tax options, check out CPJ's new report *Taxes and the Common Good* (**cpj.ca**) or the website of the new organization Canadians for Tax Fairness (**taxfairness.ca**).

A vision shared

Jane Hoogendam -Reitsma

WOODBRIDGE, Ont. – Who goes to visit a Christian high school on a Saturday evening near the end of June? People celebrating the vision of Christian education in song, poetry, reflection, video, chatting and dinner-theater.

Who puts 42 years into Christian education and looks like he's ready for his second career? Who has inspired teachers, colleagues, students, community members and boards to "catch the vision," even if it means sometimes thinking outside of the box? Who always encouraged young minds to question what it means to give expression in this culture as Christians?

You might have guessed it – Ren Siebenga. But the retirement celebration held June 25 was not a litany of one person's accomplishments. It was a tribute to the vision of Christian education. In his last instalment of *The Fridge Door* newsletter, Ren wrote, "They say that in four generations all traces of a person's history are gone. As the Psalmist puts it, 'What is man that you are mindful of him anyway, God?' For me, it has been about helping kids establish themselves in the first part of their lives – creating spaces and places where they can find their identity and their significance."

Ren started in the small town of Bowmanville, Ontario, building a community of teachers at Durham Christian High school (many long-haired, bearded, reflective souls) and then moved to a larger, urban high school in Woodbridge: Toronto District Christian High school (TDCH). He will be missed at TDCH, but he will continue to challenge and carry on the torch for Christian education in the future, honing the skills of other administrators, playing with his grandchildren and looking for new challenges.

Ren and Gerald Vandezande, one of CPJ's founders.

I had the privilege of being one of Ren's first students. At that time, Durham was a collection of portables attached to the grade school. The girls in our class were impressed with his muscles and tan, as well as his baseball skills. The first year in the classroom he was engaging, but I remember there was also a touch of shyness. He made history come alive in the classroom, and brought us to a clearing in the woods for theatre arts. In those days we didn't worry too much about ISU's and major exams, but spent many classes questioning the meaning of life, man's place in society and how to take care of God's world in a responsible way. We wrestled with books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers*. I appreciated Ren because, after I graduated, he was still there, sitting by a bonfire or in his office – interested in my life journey. In his words of response June 25, Ren said that school [students & teachers] is primarily about relationships. Thanks, Ren, for sharing yourself with those planted in your path these 42 years.

Jane Hoogendam-Reitsma is VP of Knox Christian School in Bowmanville, Ontario. She lives in Cobourg.

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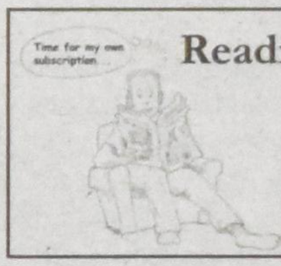

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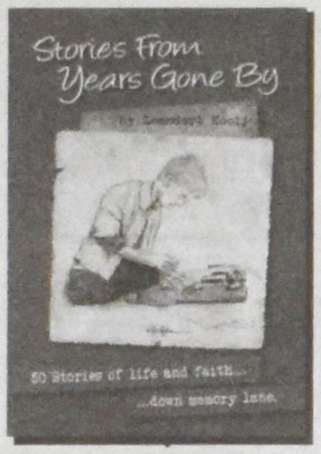

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Obituaries

Holland 1921 Trenton 2011

God's grace is sufficient for me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

The Lord took home our dear sister-in-law and aunt

WILLEMIEN HEIDEMAN (nee Meynen)

on June 15, 2011, at the age of 89.
Loved wife of John Heideman.

Gerda† and John† Hiddink
Grada & Bernard Groot-Nibbelink
Riek & Henk Hakkesteegt
And in the Netherlands
Wim† and Willemien Heideman
Mien and Derk† Heinen
Henk & Janny Heideman
Gerhardt Heideman†
Annie & Dick Perebolte
and many nieces and nephews

JAN "JOHN" DONKER

of Woodstock has gone to be with his Lord in his 81st year, surrounded by his loving family at Sakura House, Woodstock on Thursday July 7, 2011.

Beloved husband of Jentje "Jennie" for over 56 years.
Dear father of
Gerrie Donker (Helen) of Dundas,
Christine Renkema (Albert) of Embro,
Shirley Renkema (Ralph),
Carolyn Axiotis (Dean) all of Woodstock and
Sharon Sandink (Shawn) of Mississauga.
Loved grandfather of twenty-two grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Dear brother of Geert Donker (Annie) of Netherlands and brother-in-law of John Bergman (Janny), Willy Van Marrum (Louwe), Luke Bergman, Tieme Bergman (Mary), Frank Bergman (Nellie), Hank Bergman (Heidi), Teena Bergman, Frieda Bergman and Corrie Bergman.

Predeceased by his brother Harko, sister Ali, brothers-in-law Jans Bergman, Bert Bergman, "John" Harm Bergman, Frank Van Marrum and sister-in-law Lise Bergman.

John and his wife Jennie have been longtime members of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church. A funeral service was held at the church on July 9 at 2:00 p.m. with Rev. Dirk Miedema officiating. Interment in the Oxford Memorial Park Cemetery. If desired, memorial contributions to the Christian Reformed World Relief Fund would be appreciated and may be arranged through the Brock and Visser Funeral Home, Woodstock, 519-539-0004. Online condolences at www.brockandvisser.com

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The Wevers family reunion on July 1st in Coalhurst, Alberta.

Sixty years of blessings: *the Wevers family in Canada*

Mike Wevers

COALHURST, Alberta – In 1951, Jan and Willemina Wevers packed up their thirteen children and left the Netherlands. Like many Dutch immigrants, they were certain that a devastated Europe could not sustain their family. They sold their bakery in Overijssel, leaving for an uncertain future in Canada – but one where opportunities beckoned.

They arrived in southern Alberta with $50 left in their pockets. A three-room beet shack was their first home, with an adjacent outbuilding where the big boys slept. When the bitter winter of 1951-52 arrived, the entire family stayed in the shack huddled around the wood stove! They even hosted friends for Christmas and New Year's that first winter. There was always room for one more in their home, including as it turns out, one new Canadian, with my birth in 1953.

After my family moved to Lethbridge, they joined the Christian Reformed Church (now First CRC), which moved into a new building in 1956 with its "We Preach Christ Crucified" memorably emblazoned on the pulpit's wall. Church was an integral part of our family's life. While I can give some credit to catechism from Pastors Andrew Kuyvenhoven, John Vriend and Bert Mulder for developing my theological interest, I learned most of its practical application at our home's Sunday morning coffees after church. I did not know what parsing meant back then, but trust me, my relatives and their friends could put some public policy analysts to shame in their thorough sermon dissection.

The Wevers family boarding the Castel Bianco immigrant ship in 1951.

The family's social life was also church-centred, joyously celebrating bazaars, church picnics, and YPS events. My elderly parents chose to help start Maranatha CRC in 1975. It was the church where both their funerals took place in 1987, some 5 months apart, my mother having died of a broken heart after my father's death in January. My parents would be glad to know that some of their children and many of their grandchildren and now great-grandchildren still worship at Maranatha, joined by many in diverse Christian congregations wherever the Wevers now live.

Our family has continued to grow and prosper. On the Canada Day long weekend, over 170 Wevers met in Coalhurst, Alberta for a family reunion. On July 1, we celebrated becoming part of the great Canadian nation. On Sunday, we celebrated God's faithfulness to the 12 surviving siblings and the entire family. One sister who was unable to attend was even "skyped" in. Our service ended with an old doxology, a fitting end this tribute: Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Mike Wevers is the youngest child of Jan and Willemina Wevers. He lives in Edmonton, with Helen, his wife, and their children and grandchildren. Of the eight sisters and six brothers in the family, two sisters have passed away. The Wevers Family now resides across the breadth of Canada, from Halifax to Victoria.

Mike and Helen

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Odds and Trends

He who shouts the loudest

A 14-page special in the latest *Economist* argues that the internet is encouraging a new, conversational style of news-making, similar to the coffee house era of the 1700s. Its editors point out that there is "much to celebrate in the noisy, diverse . . . argumentative and stridently alive environment of the news business in the age of the internet." What they seem to forget, however, is that word-of-mouth isn't the most reliable transmission method, as anyone who has played the game "telephone" knows.

Here's some proof: the BBC recently reported that an ultra-Orthodox judge in Jerusalem had sentenced a dog to death by stoning. The story also ran in *Time Magazine* and *Agence France Presse*, among others.

The Jerusalem court denied the incident and shared the boring truth: a dog got into court; a dogcatcher was called. Foreign press had picked the story up from Ynet, an Israeli newspaper's website, which had in turn borrowed the story from a smaller news outlet in the Orthodox community. At each point the tale grew a little wilder, until "Dog stoned to death" made headlines. Well, misunderstandings like that are bound to happen in a noisy, diverse and argumentative coffee house, right?

Good-bye, heavy backpack

Smart phones, smart boards (digital chalkboards) . . . and now smart schools. The education minister of South Korea just announced that it will replace all paper textbooks with digital ones by 2015. Using e-tablets, phones and computers, students will be able to download the material currently available in print. The switch is expected to bring more interaction and interest to the classroom, as the new technology will incorporate video, animation, virtual reality and hyperlinks. Already the most wired nation in the world, South Korea has broadband connections seven times faster than the world average, making the transition easier.

North American schools are also experimenting with digital books, but usually as a supplement – not a replacement – for print. Many already use touch technology, which allows students to highlight material digitally, make notes and share them with other students through media platforms. Still, digital sales accounted for just three percent of textbook sales last year in the U.S., but that is expected to rise to 25 percent by 2015. So it might be a few years yet before your grade one student has an I-pad on his back-to-school supply list.

Angela Reitsma Bick